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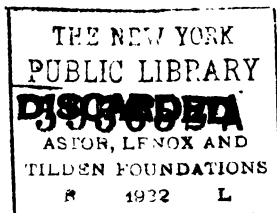
by MARIAN ^(Metcalfe) COX

author of
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ARS AMORIS

ARS AMORIS

CHAPTER I

A WOMAN supremely favored by fortune becomes the mirror of her epoch. Her absorptive power sums up and reproduces the characteristics of her day. With beauty, brains, wealth and position, vanity makes her accept Fashion as master of them all. And as fashion is but the taste of the powerful materialized by the menial, she thus becomes the creation of everybody. She is the woman of the world.

Such a woman is a work of art and the ultimate of man's industry. Her personality flowers every achievement. Her intellect mirrors contemporary culture. Her morality is that which is current in her sphere. Her character develops from her one fidelity: faithful-

ness to the tenets of her world of fashion. And she is strong through this devotion, beneath all her surface yielding to the importunity of every desire. Seemingly weak through the perennial prompting to please, she is in reality strong through her rigid limitations to the surface.

Her mania is to possess everything and to be possessed by nothing. She is a paradox whose exploited weaknesses correspond to her secret strengths. She appears to be as useless, harmless and inconsequential as the powder upon a butterfly's wings but, in reality, is as significant, vital and potent as the pollen from which the flower-world springs. For in her is consummated the life of the surface. She is the cream, the down, the finesse of existence.

To look at her, to hear her talk and laugh, one would fancy her daily existence made of the stuff of dreams: that her phantasm-being rested its nights upon the rose-leaf bed of Heliogabalus, delectated its dainty palate upon some such rare and bizarre dish as that

of Æsop, tongues of parrots that had learned to talk, and with elixirs whose secret worth was presided over by Aphrodite and all the delicate Sibyls.

It is impossible to imagine her obsessed with aught so gross as appetites of earthly kind. And yet her supreme significance consists herein: she is the triumph of the earth as an incarnation of its appetites which flourish most in its two extremes of human kind—the cannibal who devours because he glorifies his own life-need beyond that of all other flesh, and the parasite of elegance who devours to crown her vanity as sovereign.

But, one may well ask, where in the world of to-day are the dishes to be devoured by the fabulous and dainty lusts of such a being?

The life of one woman, Sabille Orman, may reveal some of them.

The life of Sabille Orman had been simply the comedy of success, played in the most appropriate *mise-en-scène* the greatest city in the

New World can furnish, up to a certain period. Then the mysterious forces of destiny began to ferment in equivocal changes around her and to cast upon her mind some dim prophetic sense which she attributed to various wearisome happenings of the day as she lay upon the lounge in her dressing room one evening before dinner, endeavoring to plunge all thought into the temporary oblivion that would refresh her spirit for the coming night's excitement of pleasure.

She was in a charming little room, mellow with satin hangings, profound with a mossy Aubusson rug of faint yellow, and snowy bear skins, glancing with mirrors and pallid woods wrought as intricately as though by a goldsmith's art, and silken lamps lit here and there like illumined blossoms.

She lay against a heap of cream-colored cushions with her mind solely obsessed by the desire not to think.

To preserve this attitude of mind during a

specified time each day had of late become a habit of hers; the idea having been suggested to her in a lecture on psychology she had attended that winter, given in the salon of one of her friends who affected the intellectuality at present fashionable. The lecturer had explained certain processes of the will that could produce upon the mind, though wide awake, the restfulness of sleep, and since then Sabille had practised it every day at this particular hour before dressing for dinner.

The idea had appealed to her as a preservative of beauty, a sort of equivalent for that beauty-sleep before midnight which she always missed. And although she was but twenty-six years of age and had the freshness of a child just awakened from slumber in her limpid eyes, tightly-rolled lips and dew-filled cheeks, she was far too sophisticated and clever not to have adopted already many expedients for the prolongation of endowments so exquisite that, like all perfect things, she feared their brevity.

This to her was one of the penalties of thought: to realize the precariousness of every possession. Cleverness indeed has many penalties contingent upon its possession by a beautiful woman. It makes one review the past and forecast the future, ageing the spirit if not the appearance prematurely, it inflicts insomnia sometimes from excess of cerebral activity, it makes one incredulous, vacillating and pessimistic, and therefore is a handicap to one whose temperament is greedy for inordinate pleasures.

One of the supreme charms of Sabille to others was that she did not take her intellect seriously. She played with it, somewhat disdainfully and capriciously as she played with everything. Possessing brilliant power of intellect and an imagination that had been nourished upon a wide range of literature, she really valued it in no way save as a sort of mental cosmetic or intoxicant which exalted her for the conquests of society.

She desired to be admired for her philistine culture, to have a quotation ready for every circumstance, to be able to discuss politics with a politician, art with an artist, literature with an author, to surprise and dazzle with her knowledge, which she had the satisfaction of knowing was but reflected knowledge—thus necessitating all the more tact and dexterity in its display—and beyond this she considered intellect a detriment to one's enjoyment of life as well as a menace to one's appearance.

So Sabille valued most highly this hour before dinner, while she languished, with relaxed muscles amid her cushions, and held lightly closed her eyelids, so flutterfull of life, in the endeavor to erase all the impressions of the day for a fillip from the restorative syrups of Poppyland.

At this moment, she was particularly anxious to stagnate the running streams of consciousness, for she was sensing a demand upon her thought which vexed her because it could not

be postponed, avoided or delegated to others: her three solutions for all difficulties, problems and demands. This one had to be faced and solved at once. And although it was such a trivial matter, the veriest commonplace of domestic affairs, the fact that it demanded real consideration and a decisive course from her made her feel like moaning aloud over its inescapability, moaning with all the querulousness of the spoilt sybarite upon finding the troublesome rose in his bed.

It involved a duty; and Sabille detested fate's or man's imposition of duties above all else. Her instincts of empire and dominion were not stronger than her desire to be free from all duties, responsibilities and consideration of others, in that perfect self-exemption which alone can secure the limitless roadway for a pampered volition and luxurious career. And this trivial matter involved the only duty which Sabille acknowledged to herself that she could not shirk: her duty to Society. Society

was her fetish and she knew she could not be one of its favored vassals without a strict fealty to all its codes and dictates; thus become as sacred to her as her own desires, complicating her thought and life with dual motifs. Personally the matter meant nothing to her, but it partook of a social phase which made it loom largely.

It concerned the conduct of two of her servants, her maid and chauffeur, forced unavoidably upon her attention that afternoon to the knowledge of the entire household, making it imperative upon her as mistress of this perfect establishment maintained by the largesse of her husband, to preside as judge over the old fashioned transgression of these two, and to act as a censor of morals for the benefit of society and the purification of below stairs gossip, standards and subsequent behavior.

In her household Sabille had earned the rather hazardous reputation of extreme amiability; for she overlooked any peccadillo and

shunned the perception of everything that would cost her time or annoyance to rectify. Although not in the least indolent or indifferent, the overweening egotism that kept her ever vigilant in preserving her mood for enjoyment made her simulate these qualities which imbue their possessor with a reputation for amiability.

Unfortunately this mishap could not be overlooked or temporized with—as otherwise she would have done—because everybody was apprized of it, and in her own disposition of it she would be supposed to reveal the true attitude of one of exalted station toward the prime social questions: morality and immorality.

How should she dispose of it in an effective way, at once beneficial to the propriety of her domestic retinue, and significant of the high ideals that one of her position must possess in order to wield the requisite authority and immunity from all criticism of her own conduct? This was her problem.

She now found she could not ignore the trend of thought, so stimulated, and achieve the mental blankness whose restfulness she had desired, and suddenly opening wide her quivering eyelids, clasped her hands behind her head and stared up at the ceiling, decorated with a *ronde* of Cupids—all at once alertly cognizant in the resolve to rid herself of the problem by a summary contemplation.

What did her position require of her? she asked herself, realizing that this must be the pilotage of her reflection on the great abstract theme, for of course all moral views and acts depend upon one's position in life.

The world doubts the morality of all who are insecure of position in its weals, and gives the benefit of the doubt to the immorality of all who are securely grounded in them; for its attitude to human nature is inspired by the philosopher's dictum that "morality does not begin until the law of self-preservation is secure," but like all creators of fiction it tries to

hide its true inspiration and pretend some false one.

What is morality? Sabille then pursued in her self-communion.

Morality is the technique of life which has made of society an art instead of an orgy, and represents the triumph of man over nature.

And what is immorality?

An apostasy of some kind from the divine institutions created by socialized man. For a woman it has been made but one thing, the illegal gift of herself.

She who forgets legality, in her faithfulness to human nature, becomes a traitor to social organization, the scab laborer of her sex, who defies its self-preservative union for matrimony, and so must be penalized by all women.

Considering it thus Sabille felt that she could be virtuously indignant with her maid, who certainly had been thus guilty, sufficiently indignant, at least, to ignore the merits which had

made her keep Marie in her service such a long while.

Above all she realized that it was the duty of her class to protest against immorality in those of inferior classes, for her acuteness grasped the fact that the pleasures and privileges of the rich depend upon the virtues of the poor. Virtue must be maintained in those of inferior social station. Their shoulders must be strong in endurance to serve the rich. Virtue fills the spirit with lead or steel—necessary fortifications for that civilization whose morality has never yet been founded upon the science of human nature but only upon that of economics.

Without any difficulty whatsoever, Sabille now perceived that she must discharge her maid that very evening as a merited punishment.

And the other—must she discharge him also? She considered his merits: such a careful driver amid the perilous traffic of the city, so free from vices of any consequential kind,

drinking, smoking, unreliability of hours, etc. How could she ever replace him? With such exceptional qualifications he could find another position immediately, even without a warranty of character from her house, for he was well known in the garages. Then why should she discharge him since it would be no punishment to him as it would be to Marie? An act must produce an effect to be worth performing. There is no wisdom in kicking a stone. That is why the world naturally reserves its kicks for those who feel them the most. The world is wise. Sabille decided to retain the man in her service.

But—she asked herself—would the other servants consider this unjust so that the lesson of Marie's punishment and of Mrs. Orman as a rigid sponsor of morals fail of its effect?

Unjust!

Well, who had ever settled a sex question with justice? And from what could humanity learn justice since the Creator Himself has in-

flicted the great injustice—of all the sex pains and travail exclusively upon women? God is very human. He too makes the weakest suffer the most. No wonder the social and legislative laws, the written and unwritten codes and everybody's mind—are warped with injustice concerning sex. The very name seems to produce an effect upon human nature, good and bad alike, which disqualifies it for an unbiased jurisdiction. What individual has ever mastered its problems? In fact it seems to be a great accident, a colossal joke which yet is the prerequisite of human existence. No wonder God hides His face from man. Perhaps it has a terrible laugh upon it. One must laugh at his mistakes else they kill him. Man is the only animal who has the consciousness of sex immorality and is the only animal that laughs. Even the greatest Teacher who has appeared upon earth, gave no feasible guidance, and said less, upon that subject than upon any other, although it is the basis of all the virtues.

Then who can be a mentor of sex morality? The moral cannot be so because their minds are filled with a savage rancor toward the impulses they have overcome in themselves. And can the immoral judge morality?

Doubtless the whole trouble with the system as constituted to-day is this: morality is created either by the moral whose pathologic condition, resulting from restraint, renders them incapable of a clear uncongested view of the matter, or by the immoral who desire to safeguard their own and all immorality, by doctrinating it for the world as the forbidden and severely penalized. Then who can be a judge? To judge anything in life one must be free from life.

As Sabille resolved it thus in her sinuous mind, she felt again disgusted with the futility and folly of thought, and arising impatiently from her recumbence, rang for her maid and began the preliminaries of her evening toilette.

She sat before the long Saxe mirror over

her dressing table, shrouded in Alençon lace, bestrewn by crystal and golden articles that sparkled under the canary colored lights—and with earnest attention regarded her own image.

Sabille was one of those medium sized women of that perfect symmetry so seldom seen in the New York woman; perhaps because its denizens have not yet fused together all the diverse elements of their mixed ancestry. For as a rule, they are exaggerated in one direction to have dearth in another. Sabille was unique among them in the lovely proportions of her figure, whose delicacy was so mysteriously blent with a plenteousness that made its subtle curves distracting. Beneath long lids, her dark eyes shone so full of fire, languor and limpidity, that one could never say whether that which unveiled itself in them was passion or coldness, experience or innocence. Her mouth, wanton in the fullness of its lower lip, hinted at a sensuality which the sweetly arched upper lip seemed to deny. Her hair,

a singular color, comparable to mole-skin, grew from a brow low as that of a woman of antiquity and the peculiarity of its tint but enhanced the diaphanous richness of her complexion, which suggested a miniaturist's art upon ivory.

Everything in her features with their changing expressions, as everything in her figure with its inimitable grace, with dress, manner, and consciousness of her own power,—seemed wondrously designed to bestow upon this woman the genius of attraction.

Attraction is the web of love woven by self love. One who does not love himself greatly cannot attract love from others. It is the sense of one's own grace that makes one graceful, the power one feels that makes one powerful, the pleasure one experiences in one's self that makes one please others; and so the woman who possesses the genius of attraction only exercises her gift to the extent that she holds herself immune from love by that self-

love which invites it from others with the cunning of a web and refuses it from herself with the mystery and impenetrability of a veil. Sabelle was a consummate mistress of all the arts pertaining to her form of genius.

She now became so preoccupied with her own personality and in certain touches upon the hair that curled so prettily about her brow and shell-like ear that she was not aware of her maid as she softly entered and began moving about the room until she said:

"What gown will Madam wear this evening?"

"The black tulle. No—the mauve!"

Immediately recalling the duty to be fulfilled regarding Marie, she stole a quizzical glance at her as she moved about the room and noted the comely face marbled from tears, and the hair untidy as if just lifted from a turmoiled pillow. Doubtless the maid was inwardly cowering, and since the time of her mistress's discovery had been waiting in

wretched suspense for the summons to her room.

Sabille suddenly realized that she was fortunate in being able to dismiss her as arbitrarily as she desired. Many women find themselves in the power of their maids through an excess of confidence or carelessness, incurred from the enforced intimacy of their lives. But Sabille had never betrayed herself to one, chiefly, because she never had that desire for sympathy—even from inferiors—which so often betrays women into dangerous confidences; and her experiences of the emotions were hidden from the one who daily participated in all the secrets of her toilette, as completely, naturally and judiciously as Sabille concealed the realities of her love affairs from her husband.

Marie went to the adjoining wardrobe chamber, lined throughout with violet and sandalwood, where the gowns and lingerie were kept, and reappeared with the supple folds of

the mauve gown suspended across her arms.

Sabille then slipped from her shoulders the primrose satin *négligée* she was wearing, and stood a second in her petticoat of chiffon and Chantilly lace, while the maid formed a little nest of the gown upon the floor for her to step into, and then drew it up around the delicate undulations of her hips and over her salient breasts, shaped like those of the sphinx.

Her hands were cold and made Sabille imperceptibly start as they fastened the back of her dress, cut so deep that it almost revealed the extremity of her shoulder blades, whose satiny flesh was ambulant with every gesture of her arms. As those chill fingers touched her nudity, adjusting and fastening the dress, Sabille would have uttered an exclamation of petulance had she not been restrained by that mute self-consciousness which precedes a crisis of words, for she had decided not to speak to Marie of the matter obsessing her until the toilette was completed.

Then the maid took a pair of long white gloves from their tissue paper, while Sabille surveyed some brown and purple orchids sprawling from a bowl of Murano glass, and wondered if a cluster of them would embellish her gown. Sabille seldom wore flowers but she always kept a quantity of orchids in her room. In dreamy moments she liked to see them and found some ambiguous satisfaction in the sight of their strange, mis-shapen, scentless forms.

Orchids are the fashionable flowers of the moment because many beautiful, ultra-modern women, like Sabille, feel a vague kinship, a nameless sympathy with them. Both women and flowers are unique and alike in confusing analysis by their strange suggestion of something vicious combined with something exquisite. The flowers of luxury and of the pomp of surface, orchids need nothing from nature but a mossy foothold, no sunshine nor tears from the sky—but in the warm shade that

shelters their lives, their innocent pellicle becomes spotted with some strange sagacity and their lips writhe as though poisoned by their own unshed pollen, and their beauty is that of an Arachne.

One greenish brown cluster, sentient with spots, seemed to belong to the cobweb lace over her bosom to-night, so she lifted it from the bowl, wiped the wet stems with a little handkerchief and fastened them there.

Marie lifted over her shoulders the long ermine wrap that fell to her feet, and then in that voice whose modulations were sweetest when its words were most mordant, Sabille said:

"Marie, you must leave my service and my house this very night. Surely it is unnecessary for me to tell you why."

The muscles of one cheek twitched in the maid's face and a look of terror leapt to her eyes.

"What will become of me!" she muttered as though to herself.

"I am sure I do not know and—of course you know that you cannot expect me to give you a reference."

"But, Madam——"

"Spare me any explanations. Your life does not concern me in any way."

Hurriedly she left the room, for the maid began to weep and talk incoherently and Sabille could not endure vulgar scenes of emotion. Betrayal of one's suffering always impressed her as being ludicrous or reprehensibly weak, and she considered all sympathy morbid except the sympathy of smiles and cheer.

CHAPTER II

SABILLE pursued her way downstairs, slowly; fastening the little pearl buttons of her gloves over the wrists, and humming an air from "The Tales of Hoffman," an involuntary habit whenever she felt some nervous tension or exasperation.

As she passed through the tapestried hallway of the mezzanine floor, which opened over a marble rotunda below, she came to the open door of her husband's den where she saw him now writing at his desk upon which a goose-neck lamp shed a bright circlet of light.

She stopped to hail him with a blithe "Good-night, Charles," at which he turned around quickly and surveyed her on the threshold with a benign inquisitiveness in his round blue eyes.

In order to know a woman, the husband

must be understood; for her characteristics and conduct are inevitably affected by the peculiarities of his own.

In appearance Charles Orman was undistinguished; the plain man of forty or more, who had that touch of "prison pallor" so generally seen, unless disguised under the floridity of certain indulgences, in the New Yorker who lives like a troglodyte in his devotion to business. He was prematurely bald and pouched, had a nose like Rabelais, and eyes always full of a mild surprise which disarmed aggression.

In his personality there was nothing to betoken shrewdness or force, and yet he possessed both in his sanguine phlegmatic soul, as electricity conceals itself in the smooth inertia of amber. His one interest was money making. His one amusement was raising game cocks on a farm on Long Island. Simple in his tastes, negative or commonplace in all his views and person, one would suppose him born for no

career but that of a worthy citizen and paterfamilias without ambition in life, beyond a daily commuting 'twixt respectable drudgery and family happiness. And as one deprived of these gratifications of his organic needs, many pitied him for his mondaine wife who seemed to make of him a sort of hidden Atlas supporting the burden of the artificial paradise wherein she pursued her radiant career as one of the fashionable married celibates.

But incredible though it seems, the fact was that Orman considered himself admirably mated to Sabille, and had experienced no disillusion from the time he selected her as the beauty among the débutantes of that season, impelled by the same sensations that he had experienced in his boyhood when he selected the prettiest among the chromo-lithographs to place in the window display of his father's country store.

Sabille had been carefully reared for eligibility to the hand of wealth by ambitious par-

ents who endeavored to compensate for adroitly concealed poverty by an emphasized gentility, and a successfully arranged heraldry that proved their descent—even from Royalty. Sabille became their one great asset.

Given everything in the way of education, accomplishments and social advantages, she was welcomed amid the hosts of fortune endowed maidens; and no one but herself and parents ever knew that she married so young, before her first season ended, simply because the family exchequer could not bear the toll of imported frocks.

Sabille married Charles Orman because of his priority among her suitors in offering his hand and fortune, and he married her because her individuality affected him just as dime novels had affected him in his youth. In maturity he never read anything but the financial and political news in the papers; but his dime novel appetite was still there, which the beauty and

display of Sabille was destined to gratify completely.

Throughout the seven years of their childless marriage she had supplied the romance of his existence; her favored personality furnishing him the most adequate means he could discover for the exploitation of his material success. She made it a visible triumph, a concrete glory, heralded in every paper in which her name and picture figured, and proclaimed by her envied place and constantly aggrandizing leadership in that gilt edged circle of society for which fortunes and souls are bartered daily.

Orman respected and worshipped nothing but material success. He was a self-made man. And the humiliations and sufferings of the struggle endured in early life had left upon him the two indelible marks of that type: an insatiable desire for the social recognition of his success united with a deadened capacity for social enjoyment. Sabille supplied him with

the gratifications of the desire and the contingent trait made him content to grant her absolute liberty in pursuing her worldly existence and glory alone.

She was the one romance in his prosaic life and guardedly drab experiences and she represented a romance of the reason; romance which is a cerebral excitement much safer than that of the senses—a congenital distrust of which Orman could never overcome—and not exigent of anything from the heart whose locality it would have embarrassed him to discover.

He had not enough imagination to be jealous of Sabille in her unshared life; indeed, it was not in his arid bland soul to be jealous of anything but of material success. A lifetime spent in its pursuit had deadened him to the passions as to those forces most antagonistic to one's self interest and success. He had no desire for woman as mistress in his life, for the illicit repelled his innate conventionality;

and he had no desire for woman as companion; for in his rare moments of sociability he preferred the free comradery of men with interests similar to his own; love was an undefinable word in his mind vaguely confused with questions of hygiene, and if anyone had spoken to him of a man's spiritual need of a woman he would have considered it decadent, a term he had learned from Sabille, embodying to him everything he despised as not "sane and wholesome."

In fact there was that peculiar sexlessness without ideality in his nature which is so frequently encountered in the American—sometimes accounted for by the exclusive concentration of his vitality and imagination upon money making; but also it is an inherent alarm against himself, a memory left from cerebral impressions made by Puritan ancestry with its pillories and scarlet letters for sex offenders. That is why the American is never sure of himself in his sins or his virtues. Several genera-

tions ago he learned fear of the impulses that swayed him, hence he is full of artificiality regarding nature, and is a born detective of the unmentionable in other people and in everything.

With these idiosyncrasies it becomes comprehensible why Sabille—as a mannikin for the pomp and splendor of wealth's display—satisfied Orman completely as a woman, and why he granted her an untrammelled liberty of conduct whose safety was amply guaranteed to him by her love of social position.

In no city in the world is social position such a monitor among women as in New York. Through the influence, its women have become noted for excess of prudery or "lack of temperament" as it is variously termed. Social position is all powerful in New York simply because of its uncertainty, precariousness and general undefinedness which every one elects to define for himself, but according to what "everybody says." In the old countries, cate-

gorical birthrights or attainments entitle one to its incontestable possession; possession so secure that one can forget it in favor of other considerations. But in New York there is nothing that entitles one to social position but its possession; which makes it so fluctuating and disputable, that nothing else is ever considered or valued. Brains, money, genius of any kind, are futile to command it. No one is considered worthy of it except the person who happens to hold it; and it is always a mystery to everybody how it was obtained. It is given by everybody and so can be taken away by anything. It is gained or lost through the most inscrutable slips of fate. All who have it live in fear of losing it, so that their conduct becomes irreproachably negative or apeline; and those who aspire to it must please everybody, so that they never dare be themselves or the prize would not slip into their *qui vive* palms. Love of this social position has achieved the higher morality as well as the dis-

tinguishing traits in the psychology of the New York woman.

Orman was unerring in his judgment when he realized that love of it would regulate the conduct of his wife within safer limits than he could designate. He knew also that she had married him for his money. But these facts instead of alienating him made her all the more comprehensible and therefore admirable to him. Neither did he value anything within himself save the ability that had amassed a fortune. Thus there was a strong sympathy and understanding between this strangely assorted pair, to see whom was to recognize as mental and physical aliens, and yet mutual love of the things of the world had affianced them in indissoluble bonds closer than those of matrimony.

As Orman now veered in his chair and faced his wife in the doorway, he had that expression on his face which had made Sabille invariably describe him to her girl friends as "a man who

always looks as if he were biting his finger nails." His entire personality was implied to her in that laconicism.

"Where are you going, Sabille?" he asked.

"To dinner at the Warburtons."

"Ah, if I had known you were going there, I would have gone with you."

"Really?"

"Yes. Was I not invited?"

Sabille had tactfully maintained the illusion in him that his presence also was desired in her world, and that he was always included in the invitations which she seldom extended to him unless certain of his refusal.

"Of course. But for such a long while you have refused to go out to dinner that I never thought of asking you."

"Well, dinners bore me, you know. If the people are worth while the food spoils them and if the food is worth while they spoil it."

"Why, then, would you care to go to the

Warburtons to-night?" queried Sabille, still fastening her glove.

"Oh, there would be a purpose in that."

"What purpose?"

"Something you would not understand. Business reasons."

"Ah."

"Jim Warburton has got a political pull. He spent his money lavishly in the last election and is going to run for office himself in the next one. You know all political acquaintances and influences are valuable to me. Especially so at present. I am scheming to procure a governmental favor—with great issues at stake. Warburton knows all the wire pulling of 'special privilege' in politics, local, state and national—and it might prove profitable for me to know him better."

Sabille knew her husband was one of the owners of a public-service corporation which made him at times manifest a keen anxiety over the political elections and appointments,

the judiciary, and ownership of newspapers—but beyond these vague mentionings she knew nothing of his business life with its ramifications, and found his conversation about it a fearful bore to which she mentally closed her eyes.

"I am sorry, Charles. But it is too late now."

"Oh, well, it does not matter, I can find him at the Club," rejoined Orman, dismissing it with the easy promptitude of the man who wastes nothing, not even a regret.

"How well you are looking to-night," he smiled in the gratification of proprietorship as his eyes swept over her ermine clad figure, regal little head and delicate face, so brilliant in the plentitude of life.

"Oh, I always look well in the autumn. It is my best season. I often wonder why people believe the poets in their fabling about spring as the supreme season. To me—it is the contrary. The spring is a period of demoralization.

It unhinges the brain so that the impulses can issue forth—and all the impulses are then sapped through and through with the mounting saps of matchmaking nature. The spring weakens one physically and morally in order to make one need and dream of another, and go forth on his quest. But the autumn! How different in its influences! It instills only the desire for *self* discovery; it makes one whole and sound again—free and adventurous! Marriages are formed by spring, and ambitions by autumn.”

She lingered a few moments longer to talk with him, inspired by that custom of a constant exchange of amenities which becomes second nature to the society woman who desires to please everyone—even her husband—with those ever practised superficialities of charm glossing over the untouched realities within. Then again she bade him a gay good-night and resumed her way downstairs.

Outside the motor car stood glaring and

rhythmically snorting beside the curbstone. On either side stretched the interminable length of Fifth Avenue, regimented with the arc lights that followed each other in steady precision and ascension of big white globes over the immense darkness, broken by forms of cimmerian degrees. The park opposite seemed like an ambush of silence hiding from the dim motley instrumentation of the city.

It was a November night, but there was a heavy humidity in the atmosphere which made the cold air clammy and filled the landscape with penumbral effects, indefinable lavenders and luminosities which tintured the vistaed depths of the woods and made forge-like the skies in the southwest.

In a moment Sabille was whirling along the Avenue, passing many carriages and motors, some lit within like her own, revealing their profiled occupants enlivened in evening dress—and flashing to the passerby a fugitive suggestion of the gay, free, brilliant, moneyed world

that bit like a tooth into the breasts of the exiled, and thrilled its participants with a sense of the powerful masonry in their life quest of Pleasure.

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CHAPTER III

FLATTERY corrupts the moral woman, but curiosity corrupts the intellectual woman.

This was the discovery that fate held in reserve for Sabille to-night.

It began with her meeting an extraordinary person, Lawrence Ilford, at the dinner of the Warburtons.

Sabille was accustomed to the exclusive plutocrats of New York society and seldom met in their homes any notables, except foreign ones, from other than the financial spheres of achievement, so it was an unusual occurrence for her to encounter a personality like that of Lawrence Ilford in one of these drawing-rooms—so exclusive that one finds in them only the familiar and stereotyped of their kind or

else the imported stranger. But a man in political life is more apt to be found in New York society than one distinguished in artistic, literary or other professions. for, of course, there is that time-honored affinity between finance and politics which inspires the very rich with definite motives for the cultivation of political acquaintances.

Owing to this, young Senator Ilford was at present discovered in this milieu, the new luminary upon the political horizon, to his own surprise and secret amusement, sought, wined and dined by that very society through indictment of which he had won a part of his precocious celebrity. He was now temporarily lending himself to its lionization—inspired in the men by political motives, and in the women by his good looks—with a rather sinister amiability. For it concealed an unscrupulous purpose to use all the material and knowledge thus gleaned from the personal vantage for a book to whose writing he devoted all his spare

time and which bore the rather pompous title: "America's Megalomaniacs of Luxury."

He first sprang into public notice through a speech he delivered one night at Cooper Union. Commented upon and published broadcast throughout the land, it proved to be the first step towards the great future that seemed assured him by his commanding intellect, superb gift of oratory and magnetic personality. Until then he had been an obscure young lawyer, originally from the West, then living several years up the State, finally to land in the city, where he lived buried in his books until the irresistible forces of his calling drew him into public work and thence into the political maelstrom. Through his writings and speeches he had already become an autocrat in that blatant sphere and wielded an influence far beyond that of the official one he was holding in the State Legislature—when he and Sabille met as guests at this dinner.

His voice first struck her. Just before she

entered the drawing room it reached her from the open door and immediately held her attention.

"What an unusual voice," she thought. "It is subdued and yet is perhaps a trifle *too* vivid. I wonder who he is! I should say an actor or a preacher if I did not know the unlikelihood of either being here."

She entered the drawing room to find the group of people there listening attentively to him as he explained his views upon a certain question which his host had challenged him upon soon after his arrival. Sabille's entrance and introduction to the few strangers only momentarily interrupted the thrall in the room—again directed to him as he continued his expatiation in that voice which possessed such an immediate and singular fascination for her.

She observed him closely as he talked, and tried to fathom his personality with a curiosity that surprised herself.

He was a distinguished looking man of

about twenty-eight years of age, tall, well-built, and as she noted with approval without any of the negligent or unconventional affectations of attire usually seen in the American politician. His strongly marked face was so dark in complexion that it seemed foreign at the first glance and in contrast made the light gray of his eyes appear oddly noticeable. His eyes had a disconcerting clearness in their expression which seemed to summon a similar quality from the one upon whom they were directed. The rest of his smooth-shaven face was somewhat coarse; chin, mouth, throat; and upon his features rested that somnolence said to be characteristic of the face of genius—a sort of dullness which seems made by devouring dreams and inert passions, weighed to slumber by their own excess, until occur its startling moments of awakening, moments when the face flashes with unguessed fires and overmastering intensities, that can transfigure, deify or bestialize it.

Lawrence had such a face; the face of an extremist; masked now in a quietude which did not seem to belong to it, just as it did not seem to belong to the deep, resonant voice as he tempered it for the attentive ears of these society men and women among whom he felt an alien but conducted himself with an adaptability that was Jesuitically redeemed to himself by the hidden purpose it was serving.

As Sabille studied him, she concluded that he did not belong to the epoch nor the society in which he was found. He aroused in her vague suggestions of certain characters in history over whom she had dreamed and wondered as a school-girl; Luther, Peter the Hermit, Abelard, Mirabeau, Michael Angelo—variously gifted men whose individualities had piqued her imagination and in whom she fancied existed the same strange combination of brutality of temperament united with the mysticism of an Annunciation in the mind which she was soon to discover characterized Law-

rence Ilford apart from all the men she had ever known.

As soon as she had analyzed him to this extent, she gave her attention to what he was saying.

In this centre of exaggerated luxury, he was coolly denouncing the mania of luxury, so prevalent to-day in every class in America, and saying that the real spirit of democracy excluded luxury because it must oppose inequality, and that the ostentation of possession—the present social ideal—marked the triumph of extreme inequality in this country. As he made clear his opinions with directness and brusque simplicity, Sabille began to feel antagonized by them and their expounder. Everything he said was directly opposed to her own ideas and his insistent certitude irritated her, and aroused the desire to disparage him by the surmise that his views were colored by a prejudice whose source must be traced to his own origin from the class whose cause he was espousing as he

denounced "the Crimes of Society against the Poor."

Yes, in spite of his distinguished appearance, there was an indescribable something—a sort of noble inelegance in his ways of manner and speech and looks—which convinced Sabille that this man might possess great intellectual culture, even genius of a kind—but that he was not a gentleman by birth or by adoption of those standards and modes of life and thought which bestow upon a man that cognomen in its mere worldly sense. In this sense, a man is a gentleman whose words and acts can be depended upon in every situation as being inoffensive to his own ilk, and in perfect accord with its unwritten rules, for whose knowledge one must be born with an instinct like a pointer with its flair.

Without a doubt, Lawrence Ilford had sprung from the class whose railing against social wrongs has its root in want and envy; he was not a gentleman, and was too dominant

and vivid a personality to stir anything but resentment in drawing-room mediocrity—and yet, this opinion of him left Sabille amazed at the fact that it did not decrease the interest he had immediately stimulated in her, but on the contrary excited her curiosity all the more.

Was it because the subtlety and satiety of her mind had at last achieved that perversion in her nature which made her susceptible only to the attraction of the strange, the mysterious, the exotic—even to the antipathetic and hostile?

She could not deny the attraction this strange being possessed for her. And it was something so irrational and unjustifiable to herself—according to all her training and beliefs—that it filled her with a vague sense of chagrin and self-mockery.

It was because of this pique—she thought—that she felt a little thrill of anticipation when she found that she and Lawrence were to be dinner partners. This chance would give her

the means to gratify somewhat her curiosity concerning him, and to probe the cause of his singular fascination for her.

As soon as they were seated at the long snowy table glittering with glass, silver and china, and made tropic by the centre decoration of the rarest fruits, smothered in orchids and gardenias, she reverted to his conversation in the drawing room and took issue with him for his denunciation of luxury.

"If I believed as you do," she said, "I would live in a tub like Diogenes and eat nothing but locusts and wild honey. But here I find you in a home of luxury denouncing luxury. You are not consistent."

He smiled at her with that masculine condescension a man involuntarily assumes towards a woman who has the temerity to question the truth of his strongest convictions. He saw her then merely as a fashionable woman whose bland arts and finished powers must include the ability to argue upon momentous themes that

are meaningless to her save as pegs for the suspension of conversation.

"One must go to the empty temples to place the new gods," he replied.

"Oh, you are grandiloquent! Your mission then is to give us new gods!" She laughed softly. Her laughter confused and annoyed him.

"No. Only the old ones restored!" he retorted, pronouncing his words distinctly, even sharply, in his most impersonal manner. "I want to see America possessing its former great ideals. We must rediscover the spirit our nation possessed in its early days. Then men and women felt simplicity of life, hardship and work an honor. Now our honor is all in outvying each other in display, even to obscene extravagance. It is a diseased false pride. Its cult—of the immediate and the personal—is corrupting the mental constitution of our people. No people or nation can become great without ideals in whose service the immediate

and personal become as nothing. The Romans became great through the ideal of Rome which dominated their souls and made each individual willing to sacrifice everything, his life, his family, his fortune, to it as to a god. And the greatness of Rome was destroyed through its invasion of foreigners who sought from it only its luxuries and riches, and made of the city a vast caravansary whose soul they had slain. Our nation is also becoming a vast soulless caravansary in which each lives for his own good, his own pleasure, and his own self aggrandizement, and values nothing but his acquisitive power. It has been an excellent thing for our Democracy that each American believes, like Cicero, that his ancestry begins with himself, but it is becoming a dangerous thing for our future that he also believes posterity ends in himself. Americanism is becoming synonymous with 'everyone for himself and the devil for the hindermost,' for 'after me the deluge,' for 'catch-as-catch-can,' for everything belong-

ing to the scrupleless breviary for the conduct of rogues, hedonists and dollar diplomacy."

"I do not agree with you. As a people we show our *progress* in civilization by the growth of our new wants. Culture has no aim but to develop more wants in the individual."

"What a false ideal!" he exclaimed. "Instead of wants, in their extreme development, signifying progress in civilization, we find that it is only in corrupt periods that wants increase to the extreme of refinement and luxury we are seeing in America to-day. . . . However, the noise the Americans are making over their mistakes and wrongdoing is the surest indication that they can do right. One succumbs to no fate save through apathy of will, and as Spencer says, 'Mankind go right only when they have tried all possible ways of going wrong.'"

Evidently he wished now to end the discussion of this theme, already threshed out the past quarter of an hour in the drawing room,

and taking up the menu he commented upon some artistic fantasy in its decoration.

But Sabille launched forth upon a eulogy of Luxury according to her own philosophy, broidering upon it all her audacities and brilliancies of mind until it excelled Erasmus in the artful extravagance of his "Praise of Folly."

Lawrence looked at her as a barbarian chief might look at an intricate timepiece delicately wrought and jewelled by Tiffany, but he listened to her with amazement and quick admiration for the intellect, undisguisable beneath her persiflage.

To find this woman, devotee of fashion and pleasure, as her dress, manner and position only too surely betokened—the possessor of a rare and remarkable intellect, though marred by the vitiating influences of wealth and society, affected him with contradictory emotions of attraction and repulsion.

In order to lead her on to more self revelations, he now assumed the passive rôle in their

conversation and listened to her as she indulged all the aerial artillery of her intellect in display, with the feeling that he had indeed encountered at last an unclassifiable, puzzling creature in this execrated sphere.

If Sabille had merely been beautiful to his eyes, as she was to those of all men, she would not have produced any effect upon him; for he was somewhat contemptuous of the merely beautiful woman, seeing in her the vanity that conflicted with his own egoism and the emptiness that left his imagination dead.

And neither did the usual intellectuality found in women attract him; for he had discovered that it invariably eclipsed in a woman more than it illumined: it put out the stars of her own nature to create a background against which the glow worms—of what she knew or pretended to know—paraded for applause. Clever women are always so self-conscious of their own cleverness that everything else is extinguished in them and to them.

But this woman was unlike any he had ever known. Her mind with its levity, sub-acid wit and real power—suggesting something great and yet impish playing hide and seek with itself in frivolity's field of thistledown but striking all things with the perfect incision of its little arrows—immediately possessed for him the attraction that all complicated and mysterious things possess for intellectual people.

In spite of his surprise and teeming conjecture about her, as he listened, he turned over in his mind projects of ways and means by which to controvert the specious arguments she presented in favor of the bacchanalian revel of extravagance that she confessed was her ideal of life and happiness.

At last he said:

"Instead of disputing your views, I am going to exact a promise from you."

"A promise?"

"Yes. Will you promise to read a book I

am going to send you? A book on political economy."

She made a little *moue* of distaste.

"It will disprove all your arguments and change your opinions regarding life. It will make clear to you what I could not explain in hours of discussion. I believe it will interest you. But even if it does not, you should read it in order to have a logical grasp of the great subject which underlies all human relations and responsibilities. I see that you know nothing of political economy. This book will be a revelation to you. Will you promise to read it?"

His attitude unconsciously implied a superiority which aroused her cruelty and pride. She considered him conceited, self-opinionated and unbearably autocratic, but she hid her feline emotions under her laughing manner as she promised to read the book.

When Sabille laughed it was either to hide something or to show her pretty teeth, there-

fore her laugh was charming—like all artistry. She had no sense of humor, but her surface plasticity, cultivated to respond to everything and to everybody, supplied its semblance.

“But I would rather have you explain it to me,” she demurred. “I like to learn through the ears and not the eyes, for I am a true Eve. You know how differently the apple looked to her after the serpent had talked to her about it. And I too have found that it means more to me to hear about a thing than to discover it for myself.”

“After you have read the book I shall hope for the opportunity to talk with you about it. It will prepare your mind for what I want to say. I can then make a convert of you to my views.”

“Are you sure they are the right ones?”

“I am.”

“Ah, you are to be envied! It is so difficult to be certain of anything nowadays.”

“There are some things we must make our-

selves certain of. 'Error is but imperfect knowledge.' "

"Yes, I daresay it is necessary to know what is right in order to get any benefit from doing wrong," was her equivocal rejoinder.

The dinner had proceeded to its final courses; and the last dishes had been taken away untouched by Lawrence, so absorbed had he become in Sabille.

She fecundated his brain as no one else had ever done. And his own failure to comprehend the standpoint of her views, or to know the springs that governed the movements of that strange soul, fantastic and deformed, formed the most curious part of her fascination for him.

She stirred in him the consciousness of all that he did not know: a life he had never lived, a life enigmatic and incredible, of whose desires and motives he was totally ignorant.

She appeared to him as a living embodiment of that world of luxury he was seeking to mas-



ter and reveal in his book. And her intellect made the secrets of her worldliness seem communicable to him. He now noted the most minute details of her person and ways, and even sought significance in such a fact as that of her slight pushing back of the champagne glass when the butler again poured a few glittering drops into its untasted contents.

She saw his interrogative glance and answered it:

"No, I do not drink wine because I have found it is something one must pay for too dearly. There is no joy in a vice whose penalty one cannot escape. One cannot escape the penalties of wine, its exaltations are all paid for by depressions. It is stupid to drink. It kills the imagination, the fine fancy, the savors of life, and gives one only reality, exaggerated, abnormal and sick. I think the greatest human prerogative is—to seek to find a vice for whose pleasure we do not forfeit something. Our intellect was given us for that purpose.

It is only with the flesh that we pay the penalties. And to the extent that we can keep our vices mental, we are free, immune, the conquerors of the most horrible law of nature—cause and effect. I live only to find all the intoxications of life, but I have found that those I desire are not in wine. I prefer the intoxication of 'vine leaves in the hair' as Ibsen fancied it, or that of grapes in which are embedded all the possibilities of wine without any of the consequences. The art of life is to avoid consequences."

As she spoke she was selecting some peeled Malaga grapes from the garnishing of her salad and putting them in her mouth.

Lawrence noticed her mouth. It was a mouth of luxury. Its lips—fevered now from the highly seasoned viands that had passed over them—seemed voracious in its redness. But the suave, warm velvet of her eyes rested upon his own and seemed to reveal to his heated fancy—a hidden woman beating in all

the unwise beautiful impulses of the heart, over which the surface woman spread the mockery and satire of her intellect like the cosmetic adornment the human face must wear for the gaze of the public behind the footlights. Suddenly the thought flamed in him:

“What a wonderful experience it would be to discover the heart of this woman!”

CHAPTER IV

IT so happened that a few days later the papers announced a political meeting as going to take place one evening at Carnegie Hall and the name of Lawrence Ilford figured as one of the speakers. Sabille arranged to attend it with a party of friends in one of the boxes and for the occasion feigned a sudden interest in her country's political conditions and a desire for enlightenment regarding them.

She was bored unutterably by the speeches and the spectacle of the dull garbed multitude, sprinkled here and there with the bright hues betokening feminine presences, hushed in that profound attentiveness of the Public which makes it seem like some strange tribunal vigilant as Argus and yet giantly blind as Polyphemus—or frenzied in the confusion of ap-

plause, shouts, whistles, and the waving of little flags and handkerchiefs which made it a pandemonium of pigmy passions. She was uninterested and bored and hid her yawns behind her glove and covered her ears from the stridence of the plaudits, until Lawrence appeared upon the platform. Then immediately she sat alert and listened to every word with complete absorption, often using her opera glasses to bring nearer the features of that ardent face and lordly head.

As he addressed the audience with a militant eloquence and swayed them by the thunderous music of his voice, he became enthroned to Sabille upon a far loftier, more inaccessible and mysterious plane than he had appeared upon at the dinner party.

He was now in his true sphere. He sprang the panoply and the halo of a St. George doing battle with all the dragons of the mire of earth. And in the stern castigation of some of his remarks, his expression darkened until his

face was imbued with a heroic ferocity, a sardonic savagery, that fascinated Sabille and made inexplicable little thrills course through her spine such as she experienced sometimes in the voluptuousness of neurotic music or in intense dramatic effects in the theatre.

The spell of enshrined distance such as the stage, the rostrum, the pulpit wields, fell from his personality upon her. And seeing him thus—in his coercive position crowned by the public acclaim—she saw him aggrandized and ennobled beyond all the men she had ever known, and the fevered atmosphere excited her imagination into a state that enveloped him with a foray of dreams.

“What would be the effect of *love* upon such an austere, romantic and unworldly character?”—was their starting ground. And then she thought of love as she had known it with other men.

All her woman's life Sabille had been an explorer and experimenter upon the souls and

senses of men; but throughout her experiences she had been able to maintain an invincible pride in the fact that she had never loved, had never surrendered anything to love but her mind to its investigation in others—in order to weigh its value and learn whether or not it lived solely in the exaggerations of poets or was a mere pastime of drawing-room art and science, like a game of chess at which men and women of the world can play with emotions and sensations as the pawns.

She had found that she could command love wheresoever she willed, and although doubt was her chief incentive to it, certainty was her complete satisfaction. To seek love, awaken and play with it was her pastime, her amusement, her intoxication—but throughout it all her intellect was her ukase which penalized her severely for any transgression beyond what its edicts of worldliness allowed.

She mocked at love even while she sought it above all other experiences; and her pride con-

sisted in the fact that she remained mistress of herself throughout the most exciting intrigues incurred by her seeming eligibility as the mistress to some man that she knew would never come.

She excelled in the discovery of compromises between human nature and the drawing-room code that supplied her conscience: her conscience of a saint in the midst of her senses of a sinner; which enabled her to enjoy all the power of a courtesan within the protection and boundaries of a society that will tolerate and condone any knavery except that of nature. Knowing men as she did, she had not the slightest scruple about playing the game with them to the limit of safety, in that exquisite *Ars Amoris* as played by the woman of the world—who finds her pleasure in being a metaphysical Faustina but her self-preservation in her resolve to retain the social position of a Cæsar's wife.

Her pseudo-lovers had all been more or less

of one type—the man of her world—thoroughly unscrupulous regarding everything but the conventions and manners of his class, insignificant in soul, puerile in views and emotions, more afraid of ridicule than of bullets, beset by vanity and with no standpoint but that of self-interest—whose love might fill the senses with the aid of imagination and environment, but left the heart and intellect cold. She knew them so well. There was a deadly sameness in all their ways of love, and a covert triviality in the atmosphere, in herself or in them,—which had made her listen to the most violent protestations of the grand passion with the feeling that its self-revelation and abandon could be most appropriately made by this lover while he held a tea-cup filled to the brim from which he would not spill a drop nor forget to interrupt his declarations at their most critical moment to ask for another lump of sugar.

She had had only “drawing-room” lovers, after all, she told herself as she looked at

Lawrence Ilford, who now appeared to her like a chieftain among courtiers, and vested him with mysterious attributes to account for the novelty of his effect upon her.

Poets and orators have been the great lovers in Romance. Lawrence possessed their nature: the nature of genius—with its exaggerated sensualism united with the idealism of mind that would make of him the supreme Lover for the woman who gained dominion of his being.

Sabille now fancied that such a conquest would yield to feminine egoism its utmost gratification, would initiate her into unknown spheres of thought and emotion, would develop new situations and machinations as yet un-found in the dangerous game, and would procure for her that most intoxicating and illuminating of all the revelations her curiosity desired—the revelation of love as it can be when sublimated through a great soul into one of those supreme manifestations which have occasionally flashed their superb and terrible

lightnings across the heavens of earthly existence.

Lawrence could love thus. And he was the only man who had ever promised such a revelation to Sabille.

Watching him from beneath half-closed lids with shadowy, speculative eyes, and an infinitely mysterious smile flickering about her mouth of luxury—she now dreamed of seeing this man at her feet, all his austerities broken, all his harshness transformed to tenderness, all his strength become weakness, as disarmed and suppliant he besought her love and caresses; and she whispered to herself the secret vow; “I shall make him love me!”

The next day Sabille read the book on political economy which Lawrence had sent her the day following the dinner, for she recognized its availability in the first step to her future romance. It must serve the same purpose—in providing an excuse for contact—as the fatal book read by the lovers under the trees of the

garden of Rimini until the time came when they "read no more."

She then wrote him a letter expressing the ideas which the reading of this book had awakened in her and professed a keenly excited interest in this new theme that he had opened to her.

The context of the letter appeared piquantly incongruous upon the small note paper which was monogramed and adorned with a motto, according to the vogue in France and Austria. The motto Sabille had taken was the same as that of the Duchess de la Rochefoucauld, "C'est mon plaisir," for she could find no other so emblematic of herself, but she used it written in Latin to obviate the imitativeness in its selection.

She ended the letter with an invitation to call when he would be in the city again; and a few days afterward—late one afternoon—Lawrence presented himself at her door.

Lawrence then spent his first hour with Sa-

bille in that drawing-room which was destined to preside over the great drama of his new life and seek to make bathos and banality of its outlandish tragedy.

It was a gorgeous room furnished in the style of the Regency, but over-elaborated with priceless acquisitions from various periods. Its ceiling was a Pietro di Cortona, its purple velvet halls were hung with rich Old Masters and Petits Maîtres—but its impressiveness was rendered luxuriously livable by the broad lounges and deep arm chairs, oriental rugs and tiger and lion skins, masses of flowering shrubs—by the tea table laden with Sèvres and silver, and the fire in the monumental marble mantel-piece which mellowed with its gay homeliness all the ornate interior.

There was a more formal drawing room downstairs, severely simple and classic in its elegance, but this one on the second floor was the one Sabille elected to occupy when at home to those of her chosen preferences.

And now began Sabille's variegated moves in the hackneyed game whose course it would be tedious to follow in the early stages, fluctuating as it does between the negatives and affirmatives of two personalities, as monotonous and meaningless to others as youth's pillage of a daisy's petals with the anxious querying "he loves me, he loves me not."

At first she feigned a thirst for information on the great subjects of his interests and work. Her attitude and seeking of him flattered Lawrence immeasurably in spite of his aversion for all her ways and views of life, and his belief that he came to see her merely to gratify his curiosity as a literary man and to study her as the most perfect type of that class he was parodying and indicting in his book.

For a while each sought to maintain the illusion of a charming friendship establishing itself between them—with no aim, coquetry or *arrière pensée* in it beyond those drawing-room conversations which became a species of men-

tal intoxicant to them, holding the attraction of both good and evil, amusement and danger.

The subject of the book he had sent her formed the staple of their talk, disputes and badinage—until the hour came when Sabille grew weary of its subterfuge, and changed the course of their venturing thus:

“Really I am tired of that subject, heartily tired. I know enough now of political economy to last me until the end of my days. At least I have learned enough to realize that it does not matter what I think about it. I do not vote, so really it is not necessary for me to be converted to this or that view. To a woman like myself there can never be but the two parties in politics—‘the gloved and the unwashed,’ and I care for neither. After all, we women are all monarchists at heart. We are too decorative to be in our sphere in a democracy. That is why we flock to Europe and kowtow to foreign courts. In fact we make a mockery of your principles because you men

made the great initial mistake of leaving us entirely out of your calculations and excluding us from all political incentives and responsibility. Now we are revenging ourselves by betraying the country to monarchy again. Socially we have become the Court Jesters of European life. So we proclaim our republic as a failure so far as its effect upon human nature is concerned. I don't think a Republic can succeed until it finds a way of making itself as artistically beautiful to women and through women as monarchies so wisely have done. The femaleless parades of republics drive the women into becoming the stragglers of foreign pageantries. The one irrepressible instinct of human nature is the parading one. But you have denied its legitimate outlet to women and that is why it takes such abnormal forms in us. You exclude women from participation in public life and give them a remote household niche to sit in—where you say you will worship them—but an exaggerated respect and veneration



always react into exaggerated despising and blasphemy. Well, for my part, I can only feel relief over my political irresponsibility. Your book has warned me of the onerousness of such a burden. I dislike responsibility of any kind. I even go to church, at least I keep a pew in one, and observe Lent, in order to escape the responsibility of my soul. I do not believe that I have one, but it is the fashion to pretend so and I adore pretence. It spares one so many explanations. I really am bored at having to explain to you at last why I shall take no more interest in political economy. And I know enough of American politics now to realize that you men have made such a hopeless mess of it that women should refuse to have anything to do with it, else they will be made the scapegoats of your politics just as they have been made the scapegoats for everything they have entered from the time the fall of Eden was attributed to woman's entrance there."

From the table nearby, Sabille took a silver repoussé box and selected from it a cigarette which she lit daintily between her lips. Lawrence considered this one of the most execrable of her habits. Some day soon he intended to exercise the right of the friendship she was bestowing so lavishly, by asking her to give up this habit of smoking. Of all the vices of the modern woman of fashion, he considered this the most reprehensible and revolting—worse even than the fondling of lap dogs and the drinking of cocktails. Lawrence belonged to that type of man who is jealously fastidious about the womanhood he desires to esteem and exacts from it unalloyed virtues in order to dehumanize it for the gratification of the masculine need of Mariolatry.

Nevertheless when he saw Sabille smoke—something about it—the grace of the gesture with which she pursued it, or the mouth whose sensuality seemed innocent of itself and the cigarette but feminized the more instead of un-

sexing as until now he had believed it to do—fascinated him in ways as mysterious as all the other qualities of her charm.

She was in some new mood to-day. She wore a dress of gun metal black whose violent deadness made striking the pallors of her face and bare throat—tantalized by some long pendant earrings which imbued her with a frivolous and extreme femininity; and her eyes gleamed beneath their demure lids as full of frolic youth as a kitten's.

"Of course I understand why a man should care for a political career in America," she went on. "For it is the only one vested with power here outside of finance. If I were a man I would be a politician and prostitute my mind—as they do—by trying to please the public. So I am glad that I am not a man, for I detest the American public. It strikes me as never having excelled in anything except in the one feat which Carlyle said was the chief feat of America in history: 'to beget with a rapidity

beyond recorded example eighteen millions of the greatest bores ever seen in this world before.' ”

Sabille was now revelling in the arrival of this stage of their friendship where she could give full rein to her moods. There was an appalling impudence and recklessness in her nature which always gave her a dissipative sort of joy to betray; although she never did so except in words whose brazen sense she mollified with her most refined or ingenuous air, or her infinitely sweet smile which she knew diverted the attention from the meaning of her words to the little dimple that flowered so near the corner of her mouth.

“By the way, I fancy that would be an interesting subject to study: eugenics. I believe that I will take it up, now that I have decided to drop economics. I have heard so much of it lately. And I am sure that it is interesting because all the clever women I know that are not in love with their husbands are studying it

this winter. I am not in love with my husband so I am certain that this qualifies me for the study of eugenics."

"Why do you tell me that?" he asked very low, feeling an odd exultance from the words whose violation of the intimacies—that should be concealed in a woman from everyone—also aroused some hazy criticism.

"Because I want you to know me as I am!"

She lifted her chin with a little air of defiance.

"But it seems to me that a marriage without love would be such a tragedy to a woman that she could not speak of it lightly."

"Oh, it is a worse tragedy for a woman to love her husband. Marriage was never intended for love but for property, you know."

"You consider it so lightly because you have never known love."

"Love!" she uttered the word with an intonation of irony, but a girlish wistfulness came into her face.

She was silent a moment, as if hesitant on the verge of fuller disclosures, when she appeared to change her mind and turned to him with a little dreamy smile full of incredulity and comprehension as she asked him softly:

"You believe in love. Do you not?"

"I do, of course," he said simply.

"I wish—" she hesitated again. "I wish *I* did. Perhaps you can tell me what it is?"

"Love is the infinite in man."

"Ah! I would rather have you teach me faith in that than in political economy."

"Will you let me try?"

CHAPTER V

"LOVE has never been in my own life. I have only thought of it as of something which is policy for a woman and folly for a man. And I have never found anyone who believed in it—except yourself," said Sabille, in one of her impulses of expansive freedom with Lawrence: a sort of gamin candor mingled oddly with a touch of spiritual exaltation like one long condemned to association with inferiors who has at last found another to whom she can fearlessly open both heart and mind. "Women in love are exigent and flippant, and men egotistical and vulgar. Once called a 'splendid malady of the soul,' love is no longer splendid, but is a malady we all consider morbid, so that indifference of the heart has become the fashion. But we still play the game of love for amusement or for profit."

"Cynicism is a horrible thing if one lets it destroy the only faith left to us moderns—faith in love."

"Ah, my friend, to tell you the truth, I should fear to believe in it. I do not want it to enter my life. It arouses the claustral instinct in women and I want to belong to the world. Love has been so fatal to women. It alone has made them the dupes of men, of society, as well as the dupes of nature they are—when born women. It should be their aim to defeat it in themselves; at least until the day they have won the respect of men sufficiently to be able to show their sexual preferences and choose their own fates and mates, something they have never yet done fully, though it is the only human right worth having. But from my observations, I have discovered that men do not really want love from women. That is why it is no longer the fashion to wear one's heart on one's sleeve as during former ages. Men are afraid of women with a heart.

Their own laws have created this fear in them. Only think of our breach of promise, alimony and alienation of affection suits, and you will understand why men have become afraid of women with a heart. The days in court of woman versus man are all founded upon the heart, which appears to be made only to be wounded since its wounds have received so many legalized compensations. It has commercialized love and has had a blighting effect upon romance in men—I assure you. Now they fear to write letters, even typewritten ones, to their inamoratas, and what is a love without love letters? and have become so guarded in speech that the next generation of girls will have to propose, and in order to do so will have to propose lifelong support as well as matrimony or the delicacy of their motives might be suspected. Yes, indeed, the heart is being so feared by men that everybody is seeking some compromise with human nature, or indulges only in some romance of the reason

such as marrying a wife who can be an advertisement of her husband's prosperity—such as I am—or for social respectability valuable to doctors and lawyers, or from some such thoroughly reasonable motive. Men nowadays consider love merely as an instinct of which the refined must be ashamed or as a sort of solemn motto to be framed like a wreath from a grave and hung over the hearthstone to impress women with awe of their mission—to remain pure and faithful so that the race will not be too badly damaged by man's impurity and infidelity. The men who love by instinct are vulgar and make women ashamed of love, and the men who love by motto are the professional philanderers among tea cups, or the husbands who keep their wives like memorials—too sacred for the life of the open, a kind of dried flower valuable only for its seeds—and make women rebellious of love. No; I am quite convinced that love in the high romantic sense cannot exist to-day. It has become merely the

merchandise of indigent women or the epidermic exterior of the rich who find it amusing to exchange a play of its sensations. The *utility* of love has been discovered, hence it is exploited, syndicated, invested, all for self interest, is made a business of, and so no longer exists as an art—the art of life, as it should be. But no, love is left to the legislator, the cleric or the clinic, and has not yet been elevated into the art of our lives. I suppose it is because we are such creatures of reason. As soon as we begin to reason we discover that nature is our enemy and we endeavor to defeat it by nullifying our hearts. The man who thinks is a depraved animal—as Rousseau said. But thinking depraves a woman still more. That is why I am what I am. I am depraved by thought.”

She laughed a little, her thrilling little contralto laugh that had in it so much of the seduction of sex, and revealed between her luxurious lips the rift of her white teeth which had

something wickedly animal about their pearly smallness, as if they were milk teeth whose infantility was stained by a carnivorous precocity.

Lawrence was now at that stage where everything that Sabille said partook of a profounder meaning than that of the actual import of her words. Whenever she talked he felt as Boucher said he felt when listening to his lady love: "I love all that she is going to say; I love nothing that she says."

Her ironical and gayly discursive intellect seemed to illumine novel spheres of thought which appealed more potently to every fibre of his brain and senses than any other influence in his life had ever done, and yet, every syllable she uttered, every slightest smile and suggestive glance, held some incredibly secret power to excite, wound, torment and enchain him.

But beneath all her varying moods—treacherously superficial and mutable as the waves of

the sea—he felt some hidden menace of rebuff which hampered him from the freedom of speech she indulged in, and swayed him into listening to her as if she were about to impart to him some unforeseen cue that would extricate him from the thralling confusions of the present.

At this moment—after the voluminous opinions of love Sabille had expressed, so contrary to his own ideas—he felt bound to reply aversely and said:

“Sabille, I wish I could make you believe—even in love. I wish you had some ideal of life or of love to save you from the poison of skepticism. To possess an ideal is the only thing of importance in our lives. All that we are is owing to them. History shows us that all the progress of the world as well as the wars of religion and revolutions have been caused by some one ideal—given by a mind of genius. Our power of creating ideals enables us to recreate the earth. And we each carry a poten-

tial paradise in our soul: the ideal one can create of love. Man fell in Eden, but Eden also fell into him; and lies there to be reborn through love. But we would never have discovered this had it not been discovered first by men of genius. Love is their creation. Dante created the idealism of love, which the centuries have followed, each fancying it its own discovery, and Shakespeare perfected Dante's work of love by adding the realism of love to his idealism, so that the two have finally made of it the most sovereign power and beauty that can spring from human life. Without these ideals from genius, I doubt whether human nature would ever have lifted itself from the ground. Their ideals gave the human spirit its wings. They created the glory of love between the sexes. And I believe that if the Bible had done this instead of the poets, if indeed it had not forgotten to make this human love great and beautiful, religion would be as supreme to-day as it was in the past. The old

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religion has been killed because of its degradation of human love."

"Lawrence, I gave you permission to try to make me believe in love, but in order to convince me you will have to love me instead of talking to me about love!"

"I would be afraid to love you!" he stammered, a flush mounting his cheeks at her mischievous words.

"Why?"

"You are not free, that would be sufficient to prevent me."

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"You are old fashioned. Women married as I am consider themselves free to bestow their hearts and their thoughts where they choose."

"I would not love a woman whom I did not believe could be wholly mine."

"Oh, I would be wholly yours, Lawrence, *if* you could make me believe in the greatness and

truth of love. But I know you could never destroy that little if in my mind!"

"I do not understand you," he went on, as if searching out the rationale upon which he could establish their relations to each other.

"Would you have me different?" she murmured, leaning her head back against the cushioned support of the deep chair, with her luminous thoughtfulness suddenly beguiling from beneath the curl of her lashes.

"I would indeed," he exclaimed boyishly. "I would like to destroy the *poseuse* in you and make you a simple human being, and a *woman*."

"But why do you wish to make me different? Why does a man always desire to change the woman who attracts him? It is such a curious trait of your sex, always to want to make a woman better or worse than she is by nature, whereas it is only the combination of good and evil in her that creates her attraction. Fascination is born from contradiction. The

wholly good, or the wholly evil person possesses no charm; although of the two the evil is found to be the more interesting to everybody. The women who charm are those who leave one in uncertainty regarding their character. Character is such a deadly thing that we should see nothing of it until it is written on tombstones, and then we can be quite sure that it is a lie. From my own experience—which has really been vast in spite of your belief that I have not lived at all—I know that no man is interested in a woman unless he perceives in her elements of corruptibility. The invincibly good woman is not attractive to him because definite virtues are barriers at which men shy like horses in love with the illimitable, and the consummate bad woman is not attractive to him because all has been achieved, finished, ended in her, which as possibilities would have stimulated his imagination and so have created fascination in her for him. The thing fascinates us which promises some form of destruction or

creation. A fascinating woman is one who promises but never fulfils, who *seems* but never is. . . . I fascinate you. It is evident. And why? Because you cannot be certain as to whether I am good or evil. To you, I am contradiction incarnate. My face piques you because it is so young, while the head behind it is so old, and my eyes are absorbingly interesting to you because you cannot determine whether their light is that of innocence or of too terrible a wisdom. My faults hold you more than my merits. Then why would you change me? Why do you fear my fascination?"

CHAPTER VI

"MADAM said she was expecting you, sir, and please to wait for her in the drawing room as she will be a little late. She told me to tell you she had an important engagement to go to the Pekingese Dog Show, which she had forgotten until the last moment."

And the footman ushered Lawrence to the familiar room upstairs while the postponement in seeing her sank sharply into his heart.

She herself had made the appointment at this hour with him. She had written a little note requesting him to come to see her that afternoon, saying there was something in particular she desired to advise with him about, and he had complied with her wish at considerable inconvenience to himself, coming from Albany especially to see her at a time his presence was needed there by his official duties.

Under these circumstances to keep him waiting here, even a few moments, struck him at once as an affront, a rudeness, a flagrant ignoring of his claims in favor of—what other?

The Pekingese Dog Show.

Nothing could have angered him more than the realization of this choice of hers in the expenditure of the present time and interest belonging to him.

It excited one of his pet prejudices—the one against the fashionable woman's exploitation of dogs. He never saw one of them out driving or walking with a canine protégé beside her, but that it disgusted him; and whenever he was accompanied by anyone it invariably aroused the remark that a baby should be in its place as recipient of those favors and attentions. It always seemed to him like a perversion of womanhood.

And now as he pictured Sabille looking at the little Pekingese dogs—gaily discussing their points with the same interest and brilliancy

that she would have given to a discussion of the politics of Althusius, perhaps petting them and talking "baby talk" to them—he felt that her absurd occupation while he waited here in bemeaning patience to see her was an indignity, an unpardonable insult, under which he smarted more and more as the moments wore on, but grimly determined to wait until she came in order to resent it and rebuke her.

So far she had been the more gracious and pursuing one; she had taken the initiative in establishing their relations of intimacy, otherwise the idea of such a friendship with a woman of her order and mode of life would never have been entertained in his mind for an instant. But this episode made evident a disparity in their mutual attitudes at present which seemed humiliating to him.

Here was he—promptly responsive as always to her solicitations, arriving in the naïve punctuality of a secure adorer, awaiting her, during endless, elongated moments, as though

he had nothing better to do than thus dance attendance upon a butterfly woman's whims and dictates, like a fop or flaneur of her own world—while she found the nonsensical Pekingeses dogs of more importance and at this very moment might be laughing at him, or have forgotten him altogether.

It filled him with indignation and rancor.

And as his mind dwelt upon it, the situation in which he found himself here, in relation to Sabille, struck him with such surprise, that for the first time he sought to explain it fully to himself.

He grew introspective.

Introspection was strange to him. His life, so far, had been the outer and not the inner one. All that he had studied and reflected deeply upon had been for some definite purpose or service to his life-work, hence his learning had left him ignorant of his own, and of much in human nature, had let him remain unworn in heart in spite of many experiences

disastrous to the heart, and had left him still full of many of the illusions, credulities and ideals of adolescence. He was impetuous in action because of his faith in the integrity of his own motives. He was fearless in conduct because his self-confidence was unshakable; and his faith in his own honor—whose statutes could not be found upon the world's moral text books but, nevertheless, made him infallible to himself through the assurance that its sensitiveness would permit him to do no wrong.

This was the mental constitution which equipped him to be an apostle of Cause or Reform. For in such a mind there is no perception extraneous to its fixed one; no subtleties of consideration nor complexities of impulse to impede its sweeping movement—which thus becomes irresistible through its oblivion to everything but its own purpose. An apostle must be a one-ideaed man. His mind must see but one side of a question, his own side, for by dint of seeing many sides it becomes undecided

and restrained. It must be blinded to all issues save the one it sets forth upon.

And this mind with its peculiar moral and mental seclusiveness, with its laws of avalanche and incipient fanaticism—was that of Lawrence Ilford, forming at once the source of his strength in his own sphere and the source of his weakness in that of love.

For the first time in his life, Lawrence found himself in a situation he did not understand. According to everything he had believed of himself and of life until now, it was sheerly inexplicable.

Why was he here—homed by the attraction of these premises? What was the anonymous charm that had brought him here, again and again? What was the power of this woman—to have led him on and on into their dubious relationship? Why had she sought him? Why had he responded with an infernal exultance—defying his own will and judgment? What was the inscrutable tie uniting their twain beings

together—from the very first moment of their meeting—like some secret feud of their blood longing for reconciliation and the stagnation of its fevered flow?

He was overborne by the self-questioning to which there was no answer.

It opened to him a strange new world of dark conjecture and confused dreams whose secrets hid themselves in the most profound abysses of the human soul.

All at once he became conscious of this inner life beneath the known one—the lethal instinctive life—that mocks at one's understanding with its unfathomable pervasion coursing like arabesques of shadow throughout the pith of man.

By its power he was leashed to Sabille! By its power of the unknown he was held thus—over the brinks of fascination!

The abysses of the human soul!

Is there aught more powerful and more fatal than—the charm of the abyss?

Peering into the abyss the mind surrenders its reason to follow the arabesque of the depths until the dizziness over its futile fascination intoxicates and impels to the madman's plunge.

And it is to this that all the visions and chimeras and illusions lead—which are born of the creative mind in love.

Love belongs to the creative mind and gives its magic only to the one who can provoke its activities through the most abysmal, self-willed and mysterious agencies of the human being.

The creative mind never falls under the spell of one it cannot create; and therefore be deluded by—as it constantly is, ay, victimized by the unworthy, held and fascinated by the very faults and voids which stir the imagination to rectify, overcome, fill. This alone accounts for the uncanny charm which defective or evil women have held for some of the great men found in history and art. The normal woman does not disturb the imagination. There is

nothing to recreate in her. She is as she ought to be—a fact which invariably wields a blighting influence upon a man in spite of his vociferous approval of her. Thus it was that Sabille—in all her oddities and follies, defects, fantasies and undefinable charm—seemed diabolically contrived for Lawrence's mental undoing and moral upheaval.

But as yet Lawrence did not realize anything of his passion for her except its befuming dawn which distorted all truths with the exaggeration of unstrung mists arising from the blood under lights so young they were still spectral.

What was the power this woman exercised over him—body and soul? What were the hidden qualities of her charm? Where were the avatars of her sorcery?

The questioning beat in his brain monotonously, stupefyingly.

He looked around the room as if it might furnish him with some answer.

Even in Sabille's absence the room seemed

to hold something of her personality: something ineffable, unseizable and yet tormentingly real. Something that breathed like a perfume without a name—some infinitely subtle atmosphere which seemed lineally related to her own distant reality.

It was as if some welling imprint from her self had been left here in the air she had so often traversed: a sickening faintness and mocking intangibility like a breath from her mouth; like a mere breath from her mouth and yet it seemed to hold some monstrous potency in its triviality by which to impregnate, cloy or empoison worlds of thought and feeling.

What was it? Wherein did it reside?

His glance fell upon some orchids reposing in a Spanish-Moresque vase on a tabouret nearby.

More than any other object in the room, they seemed suggestive of her personality. Often he had seen them at her girdle or breast, always they were in this room when she was

here; and they possessed a uniqueness among all other flowers that seemed similar to the uniqueness of her charm among all other women.

He looked at them suspiciously as if to detect some clue to Sabille in them.

Orchids are the arabesques in flora-geometry. They are stamped with the indefinable secret from the depths and mystery. The most ostentatious of flowers, their wild self-display would be the candor and open abandon they seem to be—were it not for some writhe in their colorful lips that warns away, and some leer that their blotches make which hints of the covert and malignant beneath the seductive pretences of their floral simplicity and loveliness.

Was this *why* they suggested Sabille to him?

He did not know, but suddenly felt that if the soul of orchids emanated in a perfume—it was this which pervaded the atmosphere of the room with its complex, unwholesome mystery.

But no. The soulless sumptuosity of orchids yields nothing, not even a fragrance, to seize upon as its gift or reality.

Then—the dim aromas that wreathed themselves in the wake of Sabille and planted their seedlings of air upon all that she touched or breathed or lived within, must belong to some perfume she used, some secret inimitable perfume made from a trituration of the soul-dissolving perfume-soul of—luxury.

What could it be?

Why had he never asked her the *name* of the perfume she used?

Always he had been aware of it in her presence, always it had troubled him as something different from the perfumes used by all other women of elegance—but never until now had he realized the fullness of its singular effects upon the mind.

Away from her now he should be more able to discover its significance than within her distracting presence, he told himself.

Why should it wield such effects upon the mind? In what consisted its elusive difference from the perfumes of other women?

It seemed such a trifling thing, a bagatelle of fact, a hairbreadth in explanation—and yet he *must* know it in order to rebound to his old astute normality.

Perhaps it was simply this and nothing more: Sabille used perfume only in its sachet form whereas other women deadened their sachet—when used—with perfume in its extract form. To illumine the difference, he made a comparison:

The extracts belong to the last, to the finishing touches of the toilette, but sachet belongs to the first touches, to the pristine intimacies, to lingerie. The appeal of sachet is to the mind, whereas that of the extract is to the nose. Sachet makes poetry of perfume, and extract makes a fact of it. Sachet creates an olfactory piety, extract creates an olfactory patriotism. Sachet belongs to the holy of holies and is se-

creted and preserved. Extract belongs to the open, to the streets, and is lost upon the air. Sachet belongs to the first garments donned and so has something of the saintly nudity of Eve clinging to it, but extract belongs to the artifice of the final garments and banners itself for the external alone. It is blatant, a patriotism of the flesh which proclaims itself in the open. Patriotism is wholesome, vulgar and soon spent. But the incense-like satanicism of sachet endures forever through its pervasiveness of the mind which can never locate, seize, uncover or understand it, and so is everlastingly haunted by its charm of—Mystery.

The clock upon the mantel struck its silvery chime. It started him from his brooding and revealed to him that he had been here almost an hour: an hour in which he had been brought thus low into the slough of morbid introspection. But at last—it had made him understand the invidious nature and perils of his infatuation.

In a burst of lucidity he at last recognized the meaning of all the latent fevers in the abysses of the human soul, he understood the desire that she had infused like a corroding poison throughout his veins, the terrible insatiate passion for her presence which was like a disease that even her presence could not cure—and he knew that *he*, the one who had proclaimed himself to the world as the Enemy of Luxury, the Spartan of Faith, had been tested by its discovery in this woman—who was but a living embodiment of the charm of Luxury: her soul culled from its influences, her charm solely that in the charm of perfumes, flowers, music, gems, velvets, laces—all the useless fantasies created by man or the earth, caprices of nature, belonging to the play of the eyes or the mind, and finding one thus—*he loved her!*

Ah, he would no longer disguise, distort or deny the humiliating truth: he was infatuated with the luxury of this woman's body—the luxury of her mind—the luxury of her soul!

Then suddenly he saw her talking and laughing—still with the little Pekingese dogs.

The disgrace overwhelmed him.

A great hot wave of revolt and fury inundated his spirit. Impetuously he sprang up, left the room, descended with quick firm steps, took no notice of the footman who stepped forward inquiringly at the vestibule—and went out into the winter air, madly resolved to leave this house never to return, and to exorcise forever its inmate from his life and memory.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Sabille returned a few moments after Lawrence's departure, she was astonished to find that he had not waited for her until she came. Courted, flattered, spoilt and indulged by everyone all her life as she had been, she never had any compunction about her tardiness in keeping engagements and it seemed to her that to await her was itself a privilege. Did it not foment the desire to see her? In fact, it was always a good preparation for an interview. It excited the imagination; and although it might anger the one waiting, the ingratiating of her final appearance turned the anger into a whet of favor—eager to find or make amends.

So when the footman announced that Lawrence had waited here almost an hour, she merely wondered why he had not waited longer.

The fact was she had forgotten her appointment with him while she was at the Dog Show, because of her discovery there of a little Pekinese dog which she immediately desired to possess. The desire was augmented by the fact that it was not for sale, and in bartering with its reluctant owner, she had grown so excited in her determination to purchase it that she had forgotten everything else, until—victorious in its ownership, after paying the price her desire had inflated to exorbitance—she returned with her new toy in its little satin-lined basket beside her and was recalled in the hallway of her house to the remembrance of her engagement with Lawrence.

She then wondered if he were offended at her delay and had left precipitately, his brows knit in censorious displeasure, as she had sometimes seen them, and his mouth drawn in that harshness which always seemed strange to her with its combination in his temperament of extravagant ardor and generosity.

Well, she would blandish away his anger as soon as she saw him again, she assured herself, as lightly she ran upstairs, filled with the girlish vivacity that had been excited by her possession of a new plaything.

A week passed and Lawrence did not reappear. She then wrote to him a little note of apology for her breach of punctilio, saying it had been caused by an unavoidable occurrence she would explain when she saw him. But in answer only the days passed on without sign or word from him.

Of late Lawrence had not failed to see her once or several times every week, therefore his present obliteration became significant.

Was he seriously offended with her for the petty breach? Had he that ugly sulkiness in his nature which made him nourish small slights into culminating grievances?—a trait that should have been foreign to one of his greatness of mind, and yet, she knew, characterized those of inordinate sensibility irrespec-

tive of every counterpoise their superior faculties might present.

For some time now, Sabille had felt that she knew Lawrence thoroughly, and the knowledge had slackened her first curiosity about him. She felt sure of him and of the end, and so was no longer impatient, but delighted in dalliance, in the unspoken and feigned uncertainties and euphemisms of their intercourse; for she had that feline procrastination which prompted her to wait after her little paw had singled out and once clutched its victim, to close her eyes in languorous indifference over it, to turn away and seem to hiss "escape" to the object of her sanguinary attentions, to become actually hungerless as she gauged the distance and the limits which precluded the possibility of escape. Thus Sabille had felt towards him as soon as she believed that she understood him thoroughly. Knowledge of his character had made her too certain of him. Her fancy had relaxed its activities. She had grown convinced that when

she stretched forth her hand, she could reach, penetrate and seize in him, whatsoever she desired, so the desire had grown patient, subtle and slumberous.

There was no doubt in her mind but that he would be the sublime lover who would love her with the grand passion of her dreams, whensoever she willed. Of that she was convinced. From the very first she had seen that the qualities, the militant emotionalism, which equipped him so preëminently to be a despot in his own sphere, also equipped him to be a slave to the woman who became mistress of his passions. The very loftiness of his ascents had always betokened to Sabille the possibility of his falls. There is such a thing as weakness through excess of strength, and this she knew to be the paradox of Lawrence Ilford. It seemed that his flights into the empyreans of thought were but efforts to escape the earthliness of his nature. The very richness of his humanity attached him irremediably to the earth. He was

a man that could be "mighty or mightily fallen." Nothing human was foreign to him. There was a devouring carnality in his being from which he hid himself in the ascetic's refuges and renunciations. She recognized this, unerringly. The prognathous jaw, certain gleaming latencies in his clear light eyes, the back of his head, his full firm mouth—revealed the sleeping volcano to her, and when she discovered that it was hidden from himself by his mind's mastery and repression, it affected her with the desire to awaken it to all its destructive wreckage, just as the virtue or innocence in an attractive woman foment the desires of the male libertine. The intellectual woman possesses certain traits that have been so far considered the masculine ones by those still ignorant of the moral and spiritual phenomena in woman from her modern intellectualization. The one just mentioned comes from her new need of the *imagination* in love, and another is her desire to keep love contingent upon her own

initiative and choice, preferring the seeking instead of the accorded feminine rôle of the besought. Sabille was thus.

Secure in her knowledge of him and her irresistible power over him, she now found amusement in the idea of his self-banishment, and merely speculated as to what length of time it might endure considering the conditions involved in it. She did not fear the effect of absence upon him, for she knew that at certain stages, chiefly the earliest, it is the most propitious influence possible. Love in its early stages is tentative, provisional and fluctuating. Its illusions are all floating in embryo-career for their place and gestation. Absence is the great brooder of the incipient. Hence all that had begun for her in Lawrence's mind would be brought to plenitude and fixity by the brooding power of absence.

It put her in a teasing humor towards him; and from an impulse of coquetry, as though it would torment him even in his ignorance, she

plunged more than ever into the gaieties and pursuits of her social life. For a brief time it gave her a new zest in flirting and courting the admiration of men, in the extravagances of speech and dress which she knew he disapproved of, and in every expression and power of her calling as a woman of fashion. Her acts partook of a new significance as she fancied them affecting the absent one, and were to her like the little pins that olden time witches stuck into the effigies of their secretly chosen victims, giving her a similar malicious gratification for a while.

Then she grew bored with the men who did not seem worth the effort of pleasing unless it were known to Lawrence and distressed him; and bored still more with the women whose daytime parties without men, as is the custom in New York, always struck her as being like stage scenery off the stage, an unmeaning, misplaced showiness.

For Lawrence was oblivious to everything

she did. Absence and silence blotted him completely from her, and gave the consent of indifference to everything that she said or did in her life, so that, suddenly, her conduct lost its mischievous incentives. She became unutterably bored. For the first time in her life she was impressed by the uselessness and futility of an existence devoted solely to the quest of pleasure and a vainglorious power.

Power! In what does the power of a society beauty consist?

Sabille was merely one of those women who are watched, envied, admired, emulated, adored or detested wherever they go; their appearance being their only effort: a woman at whom little shop girls gape in astounded admiration when they glimpse her in a shop, afterwards to lie awake at night wondering about the marvel of her life and the next day copy to exaggeration her hairdressing, if nothing else.

When seen walking upon the streets, she is eyed by everyone, not for her conspicuousness

of attire, for she affects the contrary, but for that inimitable distinction which marks her apart everywhere in spite of her choice of dark hues for street costumes, and her modest empiricism of manner.

When seen at the opera, theatre or great public functions, she is not always smiling like a queen or a parvenu but usually sits wrapt in reverie, which makes her eyes beneath their deep lids seem like little temples darkened and lit by unseen tapers for the ritual of dreams, so that the spectator invariably exclaims to himself "Of what does this lovely being dream? Surely it could be only of love!"

To a man she always suggests love—from some disquieting experience or innocence in her gaze, just which it is impossible to say—and in women she stirs the conception of the things they must desire, strive for and obtain, as Success in life.

Is this power a trivial or tremendous one?

At least it is the only influence this favored

being seems to care to exert over her contemporaries in her self-exemption from everything so disagreeable as realities.

After a few weeks had passed, Sabille found that she was thinking of Lawrence more persistently than she had ever done before. At the most unexpected moments she would find her mind filled with his image, her memory reliving moments and conversations they had had together. Sometimes in the midst of a gay colloquy at a dinner party, she would be seized by that fit of abstraction which came to designate his possession of her mind. Music recalled him more than anything else, and filled her with a vague, painful sense of loneliness, which separated her from everyone in her world, and yet took her to him in some occult bondage. Upon her drives through the Park and Avenue, nodding every second to her friends and acquaintances, she became aware of the poignant solitude of her life, the solitude of one whose existence is crowded with such a moving cyclorama

of other superficial lives that it finds no rock for the embrace of rest and the heart's attachment.

Lawrence was the only person and first influence that had ever made her aware of solitude: a solitude which haunted her now amid the medleys of fashionable life, and left her no respite, in any pleasure, from its haunting sense of something missed, something incomplete and unobtainable in her life—which dissatisfied her with the polished inanities and sham superficialities of her own world.

She was depressed by the strange new mood, until she realized what expedient was required for her recovery from it. Lawrence was its cause. Of that there was no doubt. Absence had increased the shadowy fascination he held for her, until she was really longing to be in his presence again, to hear his melodious voice, and above all to hear from him the avowal of what she was no longer sure of in him. She must bring him back to her.

But perhaps he had been able to forget her, perhaps his busy, trenchant life of work had finally eliminated all sentimental and sensual needs from his brain, or perhaps some other woman had usurped her place to him, some other woman he would not fear to let himself love, a woman free, and the kind he professed to admire, good, simple, genuine, true.

This prolonged absence baffled her, and the probabilities of what might have occurred during its interval—as she contemplated them—made chaos of her mind. She must bring him back.

And she realized that she could only do so by revealing herself to him as the *ideal* woman—she divined his desire for her to be—the woman with a heart.

She wrote a letter to him:

“Lawrence:

“Have you forgotten me? Why have I not seen you or had one word from you the

past long month of thirty-one days—every one of which I have thought of you?

“I am worried about you. You have made me believe in friendship, you came to me as the first *real* and disinterested friend in my life, and then as soon as I had learned to believe in you, and in the pure and beautiful attachments of the heart possible to human nature, you desert me.

“Is that kind? Is that fair? You, who have so often censured me for cruelty have at last become its exemplar to me.

“Or am I at fault? Have I offended or hurt you in some way of which I was at the time unconscious? I am inclined to believe that this is the explanation. I am so reckless and careless in speech that I may have said something you misinterpreted. Our mistakes usually come from our sincerity. And, Lawrence, in spite of all my worldly wisdom, I have never been worldly enough to delude or deceive you. With you, I have been so natural, so truly myself,

that I have *lost* you through revealing the worst phases first.

“You believe me to be irreparably selfish and heartless, and I admit that I appear so, and desire to become so. Those who have suffered through the affections become thus selfish, even the most sympathetic and generous, and endeavor to protect themselves by hardness, or its assumption. I have suffered through the affections. Those for whom I have cared have sooner or later proved themselves unworthy of the trust—whose gift I would have followed with my life.

“And yet only friendship is permissible to me in my fate. Is it nothing to be thus dwarfed by the world and one’s fate? As you must know I am a woman made for love in its full romantic sense, and yet my heart must only warm itself guardedly upon the hearthstone of friendship and deny its own true pagan fires. Is this not a difficult life? Do you wonder now that I try to be hard, worldly, cynical?

"Do not blame me, but blame my fate. My worst fault can *only* be that I have adapted myself to it. I hide myself from deeper injury by expecting nothing but amusement from life and people, and by the indulgence of my natural pliability and gaiety of temperament. In a way, is not my attitude a victory over fate? What other test is there of fitness for life—than to be equal to the blows of fate and defeat them by reciprocity? We destroy that which we love enough to make a part of ourselves. Evolution begins when we thus accept the alien into us.

"But, alas, what can I say since you are harboring a fiction of me colored by wicked prejudices which make you now consider me unworthy of the wonderful friendship you once gave me, so richly and unforgettably!

"You see only my faults. I have so many. But I am going to do penance for them all by now crushing my greatest one—pride, and tell you very humbly, simply and contritely, that I

miss you more than I have ever missed anyone in my life, and that I long, indescribably, to see you again.

"Since you left me I have learned loneliness. I shall suffer from this new-found loneliness in my life until you come to me and reassure me of your affection and regard. Am I not weak to confess this? Does it not prove to you that *after all* I am a mere woman? Your absence has illumined to me my need of you. I need your friendship. I need something true, strong and noble in my existence, else I will perish in its evils.

"Do you not *now* see how I have changed? Yes, Lawrence, you have changed me. You have at last opened my mind and given me a breath of the higher life. I can never be the same as I was before I knew you. Does this not imbue you with a responsibility toward me? Does this not link our destinies indissolubly together? Ah, we cannot escape responsibility for the things to which we have imparted our

breath, nor strike back to the earth that to which we have given wings. Lawrence, I ask you not to close your heart against the heart you have taught to need you.

Sabille."

The week after Lawrence had fled from Sabille's house, when he received her first letter—the little note of perfunctory apology—his attitude of mind upon its receipt and perusal had assured him of the success of his endeavor to obliterate her. For as he read it, he felt a blank indifference in his heart, a grim deadness to all emotion as though the scorix had at last spread over the track of the former burning lava. A sort of bitter exultance filled him at the discovery. Human beings exult in the pride of their strength for renunciation and the virtues, but there is always bitterness and a strange sense of despair in the exultance of this self-security.

It gave him a particular satisfaction to tear

the thick, tenacious paper of her note into little bits that he threw into the waste basket, just as he congratulated himself that he had really succeeded in casting her off into the undesired, the discord, the riff-raff of his life. He felt completely cured of his infatuation at that moment, and drew a deep breath of elixired freedom.

He then resumed the ways and plans of work in which he had immersed himself since his return from New York.

Since that day he had left himself no leisure for memory to traffic in. He had summoned all the forces of his will and thrown himself with an exaggerated intensity and concentration into his work. For a while it succeeded admirably. The absolute indifference with which he read Sabille's first letter was the testimony to its success.

But after that began a long monotonous period, in which he became aware of the dismal yoke of his life in its chosen toil. He struggled

in vain to combat this growing sense of its wearying incompatability. He lost all enthusiasm, and saw no good or recompense for anything in the tread-mill occupations to which he seemed hopelessly tethered. He wondered if he had not erred in his choice of a vocation, and belittled the sphere of politics in which he had cast his lot, with a saturnine observation and constant dwelling upon its seamy sides. All his inspirations had completely fled. He cared for nothing; he became gloomy, taciturn and morbid. Every one with whom he came in contact irritated his nerves, or aroused his irascibility which he visited stormily upon many innocent heads. He felt without interest or hope—like one who has reached some finality of life; and though his mind told him that the finality was *victory*, it had no effect except to make him conscious of all the damming of his spirit's flow in a stagnance bitter with dead things. He found no relief from his mood except in hating his work, in hating every human

countenance that approached him, and in anathematizing himself for having entered that political life which is full of such thankless and futile laboriousness for the right and such exclusive guerdons for the wrong. And thus the month passed until Sabille's last letter came to him.

As he read it he grew dizzy. The handwriting seemed dazzling, and fairly blinded his eyes; his heart bounded in wild morbid throes; he felt breathless; and everything he had believed dead in the depths of his being—flamed suddenly in a hyperbolic life that left his mind defenceless and his spirit prostrate before it.

An evangelical letter!

It brought the true, the beautified, the hallowed Sabille to him, who had always lived inalienably in his dreams!

How weak and abysmal is the human mind!
How utterly at the mercy of the unseen, superhuman forces that permeate it like arabesques

of shadow for its final enlightenment, undermining, cataclysms.

In the accelerated moments following his reading of the letter, it seemed to Lawrence that he could not live until he saw Sabille again.

Danger, suffering, any torture beside her would be sweeter than safety and repose without her. To see her again became the Mecca of his life.

If only once!

To see her again in all the mystery and delight and reality of her body, to hear her little throaty voice, so full of the seduction of sex in its babel of talk, to feel the puissant touch of her hand, and perhaps hold it close and still one long moment in mastery against one of the swift little motions of which it was so quivering, to look into the dusk of her eyes, so pregnant with the abysses that had forever enthralled him—what more could he ask of fate?

As he pictured her in her new-found charm and sweetness, all his heart and veins uncon-

gealed and gushed with an infinite tenderness and indulgence for her. His soul felt famished for her presence, as if it would pour manna upon its aching dearth, and at last the full dementia of his passion seized him for its trembling, sense-ridden prey.

CHAPTER VIII

SHE greeted him with a radiant spontaneity, laughing happily as they found themselves together again in her home, which robbed him of his breath a few moments in dumb rapture. Was it really she?

He felt as if he were moving in a dream. The very atmosphere of the room had changed into an intoxicating ether he had never imbibed here before. Women, so akin to nature in her secrets, know how to change the atmosphere at will around them, making it aphrodisiac as the spring or hibernating to impulse as the fall.

To-day Sabille was in the most enchanting mood of woman: that in which some long-deferred freedom in her glances and manner promises everything, every spiritual and voluptuous goal to the one who loves her.

How infinitely lovable and seductive she was!

Her eyes, so full of soft new, evangel lights, her lips, which in repose looked like two little red satin cushions inviting the recline of a kiss, and in smiles opened to the view a delicious rift of nutlike teeth, the dimple that dipped so familiarly into the secret of her cheek, the wide tender throat and breasts shaped like those of the sphinx—all her feminine individualities struck him anew as most sacred and dreadful powers to which his heart, suddenly grown wildly diffident, dared not aspire, though his flesh burned for the goal of their possessive touch.

She was dressed in some marvellous accordance with her mood which made its confection seem a part of the sweetmeats of her body. From an empire skirt of dove-gray satin, caressing every move and outline of her form, gauze formed the bodice to the collarless throat, and beneath the plane of its transparency, a delicate ornamentation appeared of lit-

tle pink roses and buds and knots and meanderings of blue ribbons that seemed like an Elysian field promised and protected through the gauze. The mysterious sachet emanated from her, but did not sicken and empoison the thought of Lawrence as before, but appeared to him as the supernalism of perfume in purity and sweetness and refinement.

"I have missed you so," she sighed, enfolding him in the maddening fondness of her eyes, as he sat beside her on the divan.

"Your letter brought me back," he stammered, in the perturbation of his emotions.

"Your letter was an epoch in my life."

"Ah, I am so glad I wrote it."

"Never would I have come here again if you had not written that letter. Sabille, it revealed you as I have always *seen* you in my dreams."

"But do not expect *too* much of me all at once. I must *grow*, Lawrence!"

He raised her hand to his burning lips, and pressed its cool flexibility against them.

"I have perfect faith in you now," he murmured.

"Without faith, friendship is a travesty."

"And love without it is an inferno."

"Why have you always doubted me so, Lawrence?" she asked, infusing a wistful melancholy into her gaze.

"Some day I will tell you. I told you once that I feared to love you, and the day I left here—as I vowed forever—it was because I knew——"

"What?" she said, below her breath as he hesitated.

"That I loved you!"

The words burst from him involuntarily, without foresight. It was the supreme revelation, and yet at last uttered, it seemed without audacity or surprise like something long established in understanding between them.

"Sabelle," he went on, his voice low and vib-

rant with passion, "I never thought I would tell you this. Until yesterday, I never acknowledged it fully to myself, though it seems to me now that I have loved you unconsciously from the very first moment we met. Now that I have told you so much, let me tell you all. You have become everything to me, Sabille: my world, my heaven, my hell. I would suffer any torture for you rather than be without you in my life. Without you, life is a void. No matter what comes from these words, no matter how many laws of man or God would condemn them, I must tell you that—I love you. You yourself can banish me from your presence forever for this confession, and yet I must make it. My love has its own rights to expression that can no longer be denied. And yet it has no aim but that expression in words, dear. My love is satisfied with the right to give itself to you. It asks nothing in return. It asks only to be believed in. Believe in me, Sabille, let me prove to you that there is such a thing as a

great love, a noble and unselfish devotion that asks for nothing but the right to adore."

As haltingly he found expression for the untutored tumult of his thoughts, her eyes were fixed eagerly upon his mobile face, as if its workings gave her some breathless satisfaction and his words enveloped her in warmth.

But after the pent-up avalanche of words had left his lips, he felt a sudden despair of his passion's expression. He felt dispossessed of all his arts and gifts in this supreme moment of his sincerity, as if every great truth even in one's self only humbles the mind and disarms it.

In the first period of a great passion there comes a humility to the mind, like a bough bent beneath the surplus of its fruitage, which is similar to the condition that Rossetti called the self-stupor of genius. Beneath its influence one takes no inventory of his own value or powers, and is inordinately grateful for the meagrest returns. At this period the lover desires only to kiss the feet of the beloved. Only reciproc-

ity can change it. But let it be reciprocated, and lo! the lover is lifted from the abjectness to the arrogance of his beatitude, and love suddenly arises from its lackey posture and presents its sovereign Claims.

"Sabelle, will you not believe in my love?" he asked with a sombre fire and supplication in his eyes.

"Lawrence," she replied softly, "such a love is an honor to a woman no matter what the conditions of her fate. Yet you must realize that the conditions of mine make it a dishonor in the sight of the world, and that your love for me must be a hopeless one unless you would have me sacrifice my position, fortune, self-respect, public esteem and all that makes me of value as a woman, for its gratification. And if you would have this, it is not love, Lawrence, that you give me."

"Dear, I swear to you that my love will never hurt you. I would kill myself rather than

mar your life in any way. I only want from you the *right* to love you."

"I have already given you that—in my letter."

"That is all I ask until the day comes when——" He grew miserable, as he contemplated the fragility of his tenure upon hope.

"Some day I may be free, Lawrence," she said dreamily, watching the morbid, amorous musing of his face, and then the quick response of hope that flashed upon it at her words.

"Yes, some day you may be free."

"And then——"

She gave him both her hands with an impulsive, girlish gesture. He clasped and kissed them so eagerly, that she feigned an effort to withdraw them and averted her face as if it were too burningly conscious of her hands as the subterfuge for the kisses meant for it. He pressed his mouth against the veined sides of her wrists and she murmured:

"Oh, you have already won too much! You

have my bluest veins to kiss! Cleopatra could find nothing better to offer!"

Then she drew her hands away, and hid them behind her a second, while she added playfully, but with a forbidding aspect:

"Now be satisfied! You must speak no more of love to me, for I shall not believe in it until you prove it in some convincing way. Words are nothing. I demand silence, patience and good conduct as pledges of your devotion until the day comes when I desire to prove its worth and reality. I will not let myself care too much for you until then. You see, Lawrence, my skepticism protects me from passion as much as the ideals of morality protect other women!"

She then took refuge in her esprit *gouailleux*, and sought a safer vantage than the divan in her favourite deep chair of orfreyed mauve satin, and sat there, and lit a cigarette, and told him what she thought of the Morality of Woman:

"Lawrence, no matter what I say or do,

never attribute my impulses or purposes to that of morality. I have none, in your sense of the word. For I am at the top of that ladder of which Nietzsche speaks, do you know his words? 'To be ashamed of one's immorality is the first step on the ladder at the end of which one is ashamed of one's morality.' The world would call me moral according to its standards; and I know that my morality is a thing to be ashamed of. I am at the end, you see, of a woman's ascent up the ladder of intellect. I do not admire morality, I am proud of the immorality of my mind, and yet after all, I do not really know just what either term conveys or signifies. No woman does. Men alone have created the morality of the world; for naturally they are anxious to be certain of whose children they support. Men alone have fashioned morality for the world, so *how*, pray tell me, can women be expected to understand it? As it stands to-day, it is the product of man's nature, not of woman's. Only the free can create,

appreciate or comprehend morality and women have never been free. Once they feared their master, man, too much, then they loved God too much, and now they love the world and fashion too much, to free themselves. Women will submit to any moral laws that men make—fashionable. Have they not always done so? Morality means nothing to women except—this is safe to do, that is not, this the world permits, that it forbids. Therefore, their conduct is moral—unless they are fools—but in reality not one has the slightest conception of a true moral idea. Even among the great intellects—in a few women the world has had—do you find one a moralist or a creator of any ideals or standards of morality? Not one. Morals have been created by men. But they have been created by them *for* women. Morals are precisely like art; they can only be created by the individual choice of a free spirit and depend altogether upon selection and taste. The world has never allowed woman to be free enough to

make any choice of the morals suited to her nature, therefore the morality of the world does not concern her will in any way, and is founded upon a libel of her which she endeavors to live up to in order not to disturb the public peace. Women have never played any real rôle in life except that of peace-makers. And they have never succeeded in being that except through hypnotizing their true natures, into singing only lullabies. . . . Oh, it is so amusing to hear you men talk about the superior moral character of women when you have made it sheerly impossible for them to have any at all! But then perhaps it is not your fault after all, nature is so immoral and women are such 'dope-fiends' of nature, that I daresay that is why they have not as yet been inspired to share in creating morality for the world and themselves, but have found it amusing, and fancied it profitable to masquerade in that which men have created. The only character which women have ever developed of their

own desire and volition is that of—the soul. Yes, sincerely they have endeavored to develop more soul than man, because the great poets have taught them that it is only the soul which makes love enduring, complicated and mentally intoxicating, the only intoxication without penalties. Every clever woman thinks and talks immeasurably about her soul, which is a thing quite apart from morality you know, for it was only man's knowledge of his possession of a soul that gave him the sense of immorality, and women since then have put all their senses into their souls. If the soul did not have its sensualities as well as the body, there would be no such thing as religion or morality—as the world considers it. Lawrence, the clever woman will never give anything but her *soul*—to love.”

And thus was ushered in the second and longest period in the romance of Lawrence and Sabelle.

She gave him only her soul; and this was

her ultima thule beyond which there was no passing.

Her soul was both the prize and forfeit of her intellect; and she could give it and take it back, could one day charter her lover's hope on it and the next revoke all its grants, in that perfect apotheosis of coquetry as mastered by the woman of the world who delights in playing with fire, because all the diversions and excitements of her life are made of playing with the powers of destruction—but remains immune against them through that modern wisdom which teaches women as well as men just how far to go to receive everything and to give nothing.

Intellect had taught Sabille everything. And the chief lesson she elicited from it was how to get the best of life and nature and people through keeping herself *free* from all.

Only beginnings are enjoyable to one with foresight. One begins life with the promise of youth and finds its fulfillment in senility, one

feels nature in his blood as a promise of the pleasures of love, whose ends bring casualties, one meets people with a thrill from their promise of enriching ties which are fulfilled in the boredom of familiarity or self-improvement.

Sabille realized that all the values of life are only in its promises, and so she had become a mistress of preliminaries, especially in love.

Sabille had sought lovers because they are the indispensable vouchers of a woman's attractions. But it is a tenet of her world that the lovers of a society woman are only lovers of her soul. Just so far as this attitude can be maintained in them, the amorous situations procured are a supercilious enjoyment for their mistress in private, and in public, these lovers, whose homage, flattery and declarations are constantly sought in manner, dress and coquetry—are the stage upon which she parades her charms, or the blue tags from the show ground where she peacocks her eligibility to all men's bids.

Sabille was so true to her tenets of fashion that she was always sure of herself. She would listen to anything. She excelled in the art of bestowing every promise without words, but her boldness of looks, manner and speech, was thoroughly balanced by her fastidiousness of action and her horror of anything approaching *flagrante delicto*—as so often read of in law courts and the yellow journals. But the necessity of her technical virtue did not conflict in any way with her passion of a collector, which prompted her to seek love and possess it—only to put under lock and key—but gratified in every fibre of the acquisitive sense.

Men are teleological creatures, they believe in going to the limit of causes, and can never understand a woman's compromises with human nature. The woman who says thus far and no farther amazes them more than the woman thoroughly barricaded against any approach. They have accustomed themselves to the thought of every virtue in woman except

the virtue of intellect, and since to-day it is becoming her chief virtue, she appears to them as astonishing as the gift of Ulysses to Achilles—a sword hidden in the garments of a woman.

Sabille's intellect was her virtue, her sin, her modesty and her immodesty, her flagrant solicitations and her prude defences, and furnished all her paraphernalia of coquetry, her mask, her fan, her veil, her *mouche*—whatsoever the contingencies of the moment required. In fact there was the extreme of that "depravation of chastity" in Sabille which a diplomat once told Bourget characterized all American women more or less.

From now on, Lawrence was to discover that her intellect alone was the Cerberus that guarded all possession of her from him, at the same time that she exploited her generosity in giving him her soul.

He then grew into that unutterably wretched condition of the man who is overmastered by an irresistible sensual passion for one who balks

all hope and forbids all seizure—with the indomitable conditions of her fate which she refuses to change, and yet traffics in his passion with sufficient response of casual tendernesses, now and then, prodigalities of promises deferred to time, little kisses, quickly or passively given in rare moments as retainers, and so on.

He idealized and adored her; with a gradually increasing awe before the invincibility of her mind which began to impress him, ambiguously, like the chastity of a young girl her legitimate suitor, making him respect her as something tormentingly sacred while at the same time he fed his imagination upon the white wonder of her body upon whose thrilling plunder he dared not venture further than a liminary kiss.

Sabille would have of love only the avowals, and sometimes in melting moments, its kisses, which she exonerated to herself by saying that they commit one to nothing, that there is nothing in a kiss except what one's mind finds in

it, and that they are the best part of love after all, for a kiss is the only thing that differentiates man's love from that of the beast.

But if his kiss grew too exigent, Sabille would take refuge away from him in one of her intellectual discourses—flippant, mocking, or startlingly brilliant, which possessed the cultivated power of detaching her completely from the personal, and confusing her lover with doubt as to his procedure and the security of his hold upon her.

Sabille indeed gave him the love of the soul. And strange to say the element of the soul without the body, has a way of producing more disaster in human nature than the body without the soul. Between lovers the kiss of the flesh ends itself. It is the syntax of experience, a period, a finish, a little tombstone. But the kiss of the spirit is a beginning, without an ending. It is hunger incarnate. It is like a prayer to the unknown. It gives nothing. It prays for everything, it has perfect faith, and it receives

nothing. Hence it demoralizes like unfulfilled promises. It creates the extremes of famine like whiffs of unobtainable weals. It is unforgettable and unslakable and so perverting in its results. Thus the kiss of the spirit becomes far more evil in its results than the kiss of the flesh. The things whose memory obsesses the mind, derange it. Unconsummated longings create monomanias. Many a man has become a Don Juan because of some one woman who gave him only her soul, and many a woman has become a Messalina in her dreams, because of some man who tells her he desires only her soul. It is only the soul that dreams; and all appetites are founded upon dreams.

In many ways the woman like Sabille who gives only her soul to a man avenges the wrongs of the woman whose body is possessed and denied a soul by men.

CHAPTER IX

SABILLE was becoming tired of her romance with Lawrence.

He was not original nor strange nor brilliant as a lover, but on the contrary had grown dull and embarrassing, as he harped upon all the insensate samenesses and absurd tautologies of love, to satiety.

She had imagined his ways of love would be something new to her—full of overpowering and unprecedented revelations—and began to lose interest as she found them to be the familiar old ways revealing the dearth of originality and lack of progress in human nature when in its apogees of sincerity.

Particularly one day, she was conscious of this humor—that she needed a new interest in life and that the game of love was only a fatu-

ity or a peril—when she opened her morning mail and was reminded of projects for the future by a letter relative to negotiations begun by her some time ago for a London house during the Coronation festivities of the coming season. The formalities to be concluded necessitated a consultation with her husband and she sought him for that purpose.

Of late, they had seen nothing of each other, both being so preoccupied by a crisis in their diverse affairs that neither had made an attempt to bridge the chasm of their mental separation by the perfunctory quests of each other's society which are pursued by tacticians in maintaining the illusion of matrimony.

She found Orman averse to entertaining the project of which she was then full. He was evasive, preoccupied, and desirous of postponing its discussion to some vague futurity. Orman excelled in the art of circumlocution in spite of his crude simplicity of manner and speech. But finally under her insistence about

an immediate arrangement of the matter, he was forced to explain to her that a particular crisis in his own affairs at this time made it impossible for him to form any decisive plans about the future.

She had never before manifested any interest in his mysterious "affairs"—always of such a tiresome practical and business nature—but in this moment as they appeared to affect her own desires and projects, she suddenly developed an interest in them and questioned him until he gave her the particulars, and the explanation of his present absorption and anxiety.

He told her of the impending difficulties in his corporation interests, which could only be averted by a certain governmental grant to be procured through the Legislature. This involved a law to be made in favor of the corporation which would not only insure its protection but would also achieve for it a vast increase of power, with its corollary of increase in

wealth. It was a big subject, pregnant with big issues, political, financial and personal, which Orman endeavored to make clear to her in order that she would leave him at this critical juncture of his interests without the petty molestation of her schemes of social pursuit and pleasure. He said that he had been sleepless and harrowed in nerves many days and nights by the serious difficulties besetting him, chief of which was the difficulty of securing anyone to introduce and champion the legislative measure since it was bound to lay its political champion open to the suspicion of bribery.

"Would Lawrence Ilford be able to do this for you?" she asked quickly upon grasping the situation.

Orman laughed.

"Ilford! Imagine him, of all men, doing such a thing! He would be the last one to do it!"

"But *could* he?" she insisted, eagerly.

"He could, of course, but it would be pre-

posterior to approach him on the matter. He was elected you know on the Radical ticket and is pledged to the 'people's interests,' which naturally are opposed to mine."

"I will ask him," she exclaimed, decisively, a flush mantling her cheeks.

"Why, Sabille, you do not understand! You are a child in these matters! Have I not made clear to you——" he began, inclined to laugh at her feminine intervention, until he was suddenly impressed by her attitude, and stopped to add, musingly, "Ilford is quite a friend of yours, I believe, is he not?"

"Yes. I have always thought so. And I shall test his friendship by asking him to do this for me."

Orman was silent as she left him. Her words had opened to him a strange realm of probability that daunted comprehension for the moment. He did not know what to make of Sabille's valiant interference. It puzzled and confused him and yet inspired the question,

"What if she *can* exert influence over Ilford?" The possibility would never have dawned upon his mind nor been entertained seriously a moment had it not been for the singular electrification of her mind in grasping it.

And Charles Orman, the enriched plebeian with eyes always full of a mild surprise, began to wonder more than ever over the unearthly powers of the marvelous creature who was his wife and yet seemed never to have anything to say to him except in that fugitive smile and glance of hers which always said:

"I must have the pleasures of life. For these I was made. I have a right to them, as a bird to its plumage, a flower to sunshine, a harp to its music. These you must give me. I am yours because of my needs. If you cannot supply them, then I must go. I am eligible solely to the man who will give me that for which I was made. I belong to Success in life."

Sabille was the principal incentive to his

money-making, for Orman vaguely realized that he could retain her in his life only by a gold anchorage. He was always uncertain of her. Their marriage seemed at times like some accident of fate and he feared its precariousness as he did that of all the casts of fortune.

In America, the idea of the rich of one day becoming the paupers of the next and vice versa, has so permeated the minds of its people that it has made an especial mark upon their psychology.

The instability of fortune in their country has made the poor of America the most optimistic and ambitious of peoples, and the rich the most doubting and suspicious. The American men are noted for their vigilance and systematic deduction from every face value, for the ability to laugh at everything for fear of being fooled by something; and the women are noted for their extraordinary perceptiveness and quick adaptability—because of this bird's-eye view of life which human nature assumes from the cita-

del of self-interest in arms against the assaulting changes of fortune.

Sabille's conversation with her husband had aroused the self-preservative instinct in her and excited the ambition which had been languishing during her dalliance with Lawrence. Sabille thought she despised money. She was instantaneous in detecting its lust in others. She was bitter in censure of her country's commercialization, she revelled in the snubbing of parvenu aspirants to her set—all the while that she kept hidden like some mechanism of ugly springs beneath a dainty begemmed surface, the realization that without it she herself would be nothing. Her power to charm would then be no more than confetti scattered upon daylit, wind-swept pavements: out of its setting, a bizarre mockery, a meaningless anachronism.

What would she be without dress, ease, jewels, equipages, the harmony of surroundings that belonged to her beauty and rôle in life? Without wealth she would even be unable to

command love—as she desired to avail herself of its æsthetic and sensuous phantasies—for only the woman of luxury is loved thus: the indigent woman being compelled to give all and so receive nothing but the duties of love or its degradations.

What if her husband lost his fortune, as so frequently occurred overnight in this country, with its panics and business uncertainties, would that not rob her life of all its romance? Or on the contrary, what if he achieved the vast increase in wealth which the success of the scheme explained to her that morning seemed to guarantee—would that not be more intoxicating than all other romances?

Although Orman's fortune was estimated beyond the million mark, Sabille had discovered in it many limitations. A million or two is nothing in the society to which she belonged; that New York society which, as some wit has said, has performed the feat of lifting itself from the ground by its own purse strings. So her for-

tune had only given her all the appearances and personal gratifications of wealth without any of its real power as exercised by some few of America's princes de facto.

All at once she felt that the supreme joy of life would be to become one of America's veritable queens of dollars whose mad orgies of gold might make them live in history beside the glorified prodigals of ancient kingdoms.

She suddenly longed to startle the world with entertainments of pearls dissolved in wine, of baths in the jewels of Ormuzd, of all the insensate regalities and extravagances her ingenious mind might contrive with an Aladdin lamp purse—for it at last appeared as the only romance in which a woman could taste the acme of life in fulfillment and consciousness of her own power. If success crowned her husband's scheme such a career would be possible!

All day Sabille was lost upon this new pathway of dreams, and in the afternoon her lover

came and found her distrait but very much excited.

His own face was pale and set as if he were exercising some great self-repression, while his eyes gazed at her longingly, sombrely, wistfully

He let his eyes have all their fill of her in melancholy lust. Love for this woman seemed a grand futility, like everything else pertaining to her. All the waste of her body's luxuriousness, all the sum and ungiven riches of her woman splendor but regaled the sight with a maddening temptation over which wavered the spectral veil of a terrible Interdiction.

"Sabille," he said, "I can endure this life no longer. I am sick of you, I am dying of you. And I can only be cured of my fatal disease of you by you. I am lost to myself and the world. I have not a moment's rest from you day and night. Passion is fatal to me. Thrown back upon itself it has debased and brutalized me. I no longer know myself. And all that I want seems so egoistic that it fills me with self-hor-

ror, remorse and despair. I want you; only you; yourself; all your soul and body and life for my own. And yet I dare not hope for this because I cannot ask you to sacrifice the things you value so greatly, for me—your wealth, your position, your pride. And yet unless I can have you—life is a frightful mockery, a wound of emptiness, a bleeding despair. Sabille, can you give me no hope?"

"You want me," she replied with both hands pushing away the hair from her hot forehead. "You desire to possess me, your every glance says that you are beginning to feel that you have a right to me, and yet you have never even proved to me that you love me!"

"Sabille!"

"Oh, it is so easy for men to mistake their desires for love, but I would sacrifice nothing for desire. In giving herself a woman gives everything, her purity, her honor according to the world's classification, her entire future and all the risks of posterity, and I have even more.

than woman's usual meed, and would give it all, for what? A man's gift of himself, which does not cost him purity, honor, the world's esteem, his own respect and future; no, it costs him nothing that it costs a woman! Lawrence, I will never give myself to a love which does not cost my lover as much as it would cost me. We only value the things for which we pay dearly."

"I would pay with my life for you if I could win you so!"

And he sighed in despair of the means to prove that the old romantic single-hearted passion that gives all for its own sake, did live in him for her, and that the very greatness of the undiscoverable gifts it ached to find for her, was at once its redemption and its curse.

She lifted her hard bright chin and watched him narrowly beneath lightly arched brows.

"Lawrence, I have found a way for you to prove this to me. I have a favor to ask of you."

And then she told him. She repeated to him

her conversation with her husband that morning and explained to him what he could do for her, and what she expected him to do for her in the matter.

Lawrence listened to her silently and imperturbably, excepting once to grasp her little hand as it gestured in her excited positing to him of the case, and to hold it tightly within his own until she had finished. Then he spoke to her as an adult would to a child, gently, gravely, patronizingly, with an attempted enlightenment of her mind towards the aspects of the affair of which she seemed totally unaware as she made her impossible request.

"You do not understand what you are asking, Sabille. It does not lie within my power to grant this 'favor,' as you put it, dear, for my political power is not my own. I am but an administrator of the public trust and to do what you ask would make me a traitor to that trust. You could not have found anything more wholly against my political principles than this

project you have explained. It involves everything I have fought against: private ownership of what should belong to the people, the protecting and building up of business interests through political power and corruption—but most of all it represents that legislative favoritism which is at the root of our nation's wrongs and sufferings. . . . I believe that the real fight of the American people should be against this species of law-making that is so opposed to the public good, instead of against law-breaking. You see, dear, the sheer impossibility of your request.”

“Aha!” she cried, her eyes suddenly ablaze. “What an illustration you are of human nature! A lover declares he will give his life and then balks at the first little favor asked of him! A husband gives all his worldly goods at the altar and then quarrels at his wife’s doctor bills! It is so easy to say one will give one’s soul or life, for it is either impossible to do so or one knows that it will never be asked of him. But

find something tangible, practical, real, to ask and a woman soon discovers how much a man's love will give for what he asks her all! Oh, I am glad I now understand so well the nature of love that I can at last put it completely out of my life. Hereafter I live solely for ambition!"

She dilated in wrath. And beneath the torrential flood of her stinging words, Lawrence was mutely overwhelmed, trying still to hold her trembling little hands which she drew fiercely away at every attempt, and to interrupt her with some clement expostulation, to which she would not listen a second but went on with disjointed exclamations of indignation and scathing scorn, until somewhat exhausting her rage, she became calmer and said in a relaxed tone:

"Lawrence, we are living in a very practical epoch and all the sacrifices to be made for love have become material ones. You have made me believe in love and that the Romance of the

heart still lives to-day. But Romeo has become Pierrot, who must hide his face beneath paint and powder from the public, and the greatest sacrifice he could make would be to be seen *au naturel*—a Romeo, and so lose his public face or name. It has taken you five months to make me willing to believe that you have a great romantic passion for me; but unfortunately I cannot confirm it as the ladies did in the ancient romantic days to which you belong by nature. Oh, I wish that I could! The old ways were by far the easier, the more thrillingly picturesque and artistic. Then women sent their loves as knights-errant to the crusades or into dens of wild animals or among the lepers. Or one might even do as Ulrich von Lichtenstein, the mediæval lover who amputated and sent one of his fingers to his mistress as proof of his devotion and capacity for endurance for her sake. Oh, it was easy then, because the mind was crude and the heart *au naturel*! And such proofs were undoubtedly convincing. I am cer-

tain you would not have refused some such proof as that. You are so elemental, so physical in fact, that physical deeds seem as nothing to you. But I ask of you something as practical as it is spiritual and moral, I ask of you something you respect and value far beyond all physical performances, and therefore the only thing to ask of you as proof of the love which you have been apostrophizing fate to give you some great means of proving. I find it, and ask it, and immediately without an instant's hesitation, you refuse it, point blank. Now what am I to think? Can I trust the honesty of your words any longer? From this moment, Lawrence, I must distrust you, and those I distrust are nothing to me. From this moment all is over between us!"

Lawrence had become pale under the scourging of the words from the one woman on earth who had any power to hurt him, just as she was the only human being who had the power to inspire him to all high or base deeds, to all hero-

isms or all grovellings, to all noble sacrifices or shameful lusts—as she willed.

“You do not understand,” he faltered.

“What you ask of me is not mine to give!”

“And pray why not?”

“It is my honor.”

“Ah! And what do you want of me except what the world calls my honor?”

“If I did what you ask it would be a betrayal of public trust!”

“And what, my friend, would be my deed, if I gave myself to you as you desire, but a betrayal of society’s trust?”

He became silent. Her goading wit triumphed over his reason and he took refuge in the dumb obduracy of his own convictions whilst he ransacked his mind for the invincible argument with which he could overcome her.

“It seems to me that in this situation we are equals,” she continued. “Equals as man and woman should be, and never have been before. You ask of me so much, I ask of you equal con-

cessions, grants and proofs of devotion . . . Lawrence, there is no great love where there is consideration of self. And I have no way of confirming your love except through this immolation of what constitutes your *public* self, for me. But you refuse it! Well, perhaps it is best for me that you do. I was beginning to believe too much in love. I was beginning to feel that I would risk everything and give everything to belong wholly to you! Ah, yes, Lawrence, I have been feeling this more and more every day until to-day when at last you have revealed that your love is unworthy of any trust from me whatsoever!"

"Sabbille"—he cleared his throat. "I do not know what to say to you. I cannot do what you ask and yet——"

"And yet you realize that I ask no more of you than you ask of me. Is it not so?"

It was the truth. With a child-like honesty he looked within his own soul, and envisaging all his egoistic desires for the complete posses-

sion of this woman, he realized that he desired as much and as selfishly and disastrously from her as she desired from him.

She saw the wavering of the set, haggard face, and suddenly she felt the most irresistible impulsion of passion towards him that she had ever experienced.

Perhaps from the excessive emotionality of the hour, or because there was some new success to be attained through his subjugation, or merely because the power to create havoc and disaster through her spell had a more perverse sorcery for her than the power to bestow good or happiness—whatever the cause of the impulse she did not stop to analyze it but surrendered to its transport, and suddenly drew herself up close to him in all the sweetest yieldingness of her body and put her arms around his neck and leaned her face against his.

"Oh, Lawrence dear, do you not see that I cannot be yours unless you will do this for me?"

"And if I do!" he said huskily. "Will you give yourself to me?"

For answer she pressed her mouth secure against his own in a mad crude passion equal to the one in him which she had so often fled from. Thrilled with strange wanton fires, she crushed all the warm grapes of her mouth against the drouth of his own as if to flood away her being with his in some wine of its consummate bliss—until all their blood and soul feuds were confused and lost in the wedlock promise of the kiss.

"My Sabille," he whispered breathlessly. "If I do what you ask—you promise me yourself!"

"I promise."

CHAPTER X

"I GIVE my soul forever so that this woman may be mine."

With the cry of Faust ringing in his soul, Lawrence committed himself to the deed appointed by Sabille, and a short time afterwards the transaction was completed which was to hurl him off the Tarpeian rock, in a lover's leap—dooming to a fate more self-annihilating and shameful than any death could have been.

A telegram informed Sabille of the consummation of her will in the drama of Lawrence's life, and that he would be in New York to see her the following day.

With admirable sang froid Sabille had apprised her husband of the success of her "political influence" upon Lawrence. Orman's bewildered admiration and gratitude for the possession of such a marvelous being—newly re-

vealed in her talent of a Metternich—was the inspiration to a tangible expression of his feelings the next day which took place in a boudoir scene between them and was the inadvertent means of furnishing Sabille with the talisman presiding over her interview with Lawrence in the afternoon.

Sabille had just finished her morning coffee—though it was verging upon the noon hour—and her maid had taken away the tray and was beginning to polish her mistress's rosy nails, as she sat before the dressing table, when Orman sought her in her room.

Sabille dismissed her maid, and Orman came to her, his soul on tiptoe—as always within the incense-laden chambers of her privacy—and bringing forth a jeweller's plush case from his pocket, made her a gift of a long rope of pearls, like a votive wreath laid upon the altar of Woman's Power.

She let him fasten it upon her, while she surveyed the process in the mirror.

He wound it twice about her bare throat and it fell low over her breasts, and she cuddled into the balmy streaming of the stones upon her flesh, laughing her delight and flushing prettily. Then she sprang up and kissed him impulsively, with the true conjugal kiss—the kiss of secure futurity, of anchorage in the tepid shallows—a kiss Sabille had almost forgotten how to give.

But after he had gone, she sat in a prolonged reverie, playing with her pearls in a delicate gloat over their beauty and costliness. The myriad little bodies gleamed in every shade and degree of purity from that of the warm ivory shadow in the dimpled roseleaf to the camphorous lustres of the moon, and it seemed incredible that these lovely things, the most perfect emblem of purity man's fancy has yet found—were but the excrescence, the self-mending, from the disease of an oyster.

Sabille remained in her reverie throughout

all the vicissitudes of that day, until finally the hour arrived that brought Lawrence.

She was again in her boudoir, still deep in her reverie, when he was announced in the drawing-room. She had now been prepared for the ordeal of this meeting a long while. She knew that it meant a *mauvais quart d'heure* for her. But after estimating every possible chance for an easier exit from the trying crisis, she saw that it was unavoidable, and so had arisen to meet it with a perfect self-confidence in her ability to dominate every situation, to dispose of every obstacle with her consummate skill, finesse and deftly spun words suited to every emergency.

Nevertheless she faltered in the hall before she entered the door of the room wherein awaited the man who had at last become a mere glamourless Obstacle to be removed from her path, and stopped still a moment—feeling faint from ominous anticipations, until her hands clasped the pearls she was wearing.

Their strength of hardness and purity gave her something of itself. From the moment of their possession every remnant of weakness she had for Lawrence had become inexorable adamant.

Lawrence was standing before the window looking out as she noiselessly entered. The luminous pallor of the winter twilight poured in from the windows and detracted from the bouquets of artificial lights against the walls of the room.

As Sabille closed the door softly behind her, Lawrence turned quickly, and came towards her with a rapturous agitation upon his face and an appalling new imperiousness in his manner.

Sabille stood still and looked at him uneasily, wondering; and for the first time in her life trembled with a nameless fear before the revelation of the emotions she had the power to evoke in this man.

He approached her with outstretched arms,

blind to everything in the exaltation his face betrayed, and in her sudden confusion—of nameless fear—Sabille became supine to the irresistible will of his embrace and found herself in his arms, enveloped in some magnetic cloud of his being, as he pressed her against his heart and she lay there with her own heart beating like a little drum in the sudden consciousness of more formidable powers now liberated and imperative in this man than her reveries had prepared her to meet.

She saw that he was in that state of reckless excitement which some stupendous crisis or finality in life achieves in the mind, unclothing it from every restraint of civilization; and there was a savage nudity in his eyes that appalled her, and the speechless kisses that he now began to press upon her mouth, her cheeks, her eyes, her brow and hair, with the wild avidity of the long deferred, terrified her as she tried to avert her numb face from them and filled her

with a dreadful sensation of hostile helplessness.

But at length she extricated herself and slipping from his embrace, escaped to the divan where she sat and eyed him in consternation—with dilated anxious eyes.

Lawrence saw nothing but his own vision of her.

And then, before either had exchanged a word, he came and knelt beside her and buried his face in the little cold hand that lay so limply in her lap. So might Samson have laid his head upon the lap of Delilah when his trust was most opulent and his passion at its zenith.

Silently he remained so long in this attitude of complete abandon and homage, in faith of their mutual love, that Sabille felt compelled to break the embarrassing pall and so—in subterfuge until a clear plan could formulate itself to her and from the impulse of the feline that fondles the thing it fears or is about to wound—

she began to play with his thick dark hair, and murmured:

"Lawrence, what a boy you are! You have never grown up. You are a perfect child!"

Lawrence lifted his head from her lap and there were tears in his eyes that he dashed away with a defiant pride smiling strangely on his lips. Putting his arms around her supple hips he held her closely as he said:

"Sabelle, my Sabelle, I have a *right* to you now. I have paid for you with my life. Until I did so—I could not make myself believe I had a right to what my love demanded. Until now, I have been tortured by the sense of guilt in my passion for you. The public idiocy that says that a love like ours can only be a wrong, a sinful one, warped even to me the perception of its greatness and—rights. Rights which make all other laws of God or man seem paltry wicked things. Before *now*, I might have given you up. My passion seemed too egoistic for me to respect its claims and I might then have been

capable of any renunciation of love and life and happiness and you. But now! . . . At last I have established my right to you as to the one dearer and greater to me than my own life. 'One has a right to the one he loves better than his own life!' It was Stendhal who said that, the great anatomist of love. Dearest, such a love becomes the only moral law, irrespective of all conditions. I know this now. I have won the right to you, my Sabille, by proving that I love you better than my life. What exquisite despotism in those words—*my right to you!* It is strange, is it not, dear, that even an illicit love must have its morality in order to be strong, beautiful and perfect? It too must have its bans and ceremonials in the dictum—one has a right to the one he loves better than his own life. All the virtues are rooted in that, all the generousities, nobilities, heroisms, valors and strengths of the human soul. What other force in life can produce such human upliftment as—this love? Then is it not the

only morality of which we mortals can be certain? Love can thus become an Omnipotence, my Sabille, the only God of Earth, to deny whom is to damn one's soul forevermore and to make a perdition of what was given us for the only human paradise. . . . We will find our paradise now in belonging to each other forever! It bursts upon me like the sun to a blind man! We belong to each other! Is it not wonderful? Oh, I love you, I love you, I love you!"

Sabille listened to him in the mute passivity caused by her knowledge that as yet she could say nothing to brook the vehemence of his words and his spirit's febrile flow, for everything that lay ready coiled within her cold philosophy seemed as useless in these transported seconds as the frost's impulsion to build its sheet of stony glitter over the mad freedom of the cataract.

She waited until the end of his lover's hyperbole. But then—before she could utter the

words that were tickling upon her tongue they were stopped by the ruthless seizure of his mouth upon her own, as again he began to kiss her.

His mouth ravished her face with its searching insatiable endearments, beneath which she became breathless with resentment at first, and then breathless in the surprise of her senses which suddenly thrilled and glowed and pulsed wildly—in a swooning voluptuousness from the infectious fevers of her lover.

Swayed agaisnt her own volition, during flying moments she abandoned her mind to the glib rationale of the senses, whispering to her their riotous-rose promises, until she longed for the perilous surrender and possession of this man who seemed so fatefully and inhumanly dowered to reach to all the unknown of her body and to startle it with its own wonder, mystery, and unprobed desires.

Then his reckless hands happened to crush the pearls she wore against her breasts until ab-



ruptly the hurtful consciousness of them recalled her from her imperilment.

The reaction was violent. She repulsed him from her as much in contemptuous anger with herself for her momentary weakness as with him.

"Oh, you are brutal!" she cried.

"Forgive me!"

"Do leave me!"

"Sabelle, tell me that you love me! You have never yet said those words to me!"

"Oh, you are absurd!"

He would have sought her lips again, but she quickly repulsed him, unclasped his arms from around her hips, and nervously began to touch her hair disordered by the frenzy of his kisses.

Still he saw only his vision of her. But calmed by her repulsion, he arose and sat beside her and said in a voice, changed, but with a tremor in it now and then:

"Sabelle, we must decide about our future together. Our lives belong to each other but it

is for you to say how and where they are to be spent. My entire life is at your disposal—as you know. I will do whatever you say. The future is yours. By doing what I have done for you—I have turned my back upon all the world and have severed myself from my own self, myself of the *past*. I no longer care for the world or for men's opinions of my life or deeds—they can call me what they like, a fool, a scoundrel, a traitor—I care not. I have chosen *you* in place of all else. I am equal to my deeds—good and evil as the world may call them, and will neither extenuate nor malign them. The past is ended and my future is yours, just as yours is mine. Sabille, have you settled upon any plans for our future? Have you decided how you will leave your life here, and give yourself to me—for *our* future together? A divorce——”

The word was like a whip-lash upon her vacillation and dangerous procrastination. Instantaneously her nerves bounded beneath it

and fortified her in a rescue and armament of the world.

"What you say is impossible!"

"Why——"

"Listen to me, Lawrence. I do not know how to tell you but——"

One final second she hesitated, toying with the tinsel galloon upon a cushion beside her, and then suddenly she cast it from her, and spoke with an inflexible precision and force.

"I do not know how to tell you, Lawrence, but I have changed my mind."

He made no reply. There was a long, long silence.

At last the paralysis of a horrible shock of premonition had fallen upon him, in which he could not speak nor coherently think, but his heart was audible in the stillness as it beat in a mad wilderness of pain.

She had said the words, she had cut the ties, she had given the *coup de grâce*; and the realization filled her with that uncanny ebullience of

levity, insolence and insouciance which is like a frothing of the soul in its true expression—a sneer, as it beholds the wreckage it has made.

“I have changed my mind,” she repeated, feeling that the words were wholly conclusive.

“What do you mean?” he managed to stammer.

“Merely that I have changed my mind, and retract all the foolish things I said to you when we were last together.”

“Sabille—what do you mean!”

“Can you not understand? Can you not see that—I have changed? You yourself have made me fully aware of this change by telling me, as you did a few moments ago, that you have now a *right* to me. I do not like people who feel that they have a right to me. I have had enough of the compulsory in marriage. I will not have it also in love. Really your rights—as you now consider them—have changed the aspect of your love. Love, my friend, must be a voluntary gift or it is nothing!”

"Stop this nonsense, Sabille!" he cried, seized by a forlorn hope that she might be only jesting in the cruel *taquinerie* of her sex. "I have heard enough of your drawing-room philosophy. You must discard it now for *life!*"

"It is *my* life, Lawrence, as you will soon realize. Hereafter I shall be true to—the drawing-room. For it embodies the only influence that makes of a woman a personage instead of a female and teaches her how to weigh, judge and master love, instead of being victimized and brutalized by it like a jungle creature. For instance, what would become of me if I did not possess the drawing-room wisdom and conscience which makes me weigh, judge and estimate the price and the cost of your love to me? It is *all* that saves me from it. It makes me see what I would surrender for it: my friends, my luxuries, my soul, my heart, my body, for you to wreck, tire of, desert at will, and to realize that any love which exacts this sacrifice of me is not worthy of the sacrifice in

the name of love. Lawrence, you think you have *proved* so much, but after all, you have not proved to me that love is a *beautiful* thing and that is the only proof I required. For in its selfish desires, exigence, and demands for the reciprocal in everything, it seems to me that love is quite as ugly, boisterous and revolutionary as all the other 'rights of man' and so is unworthy of the sacrifice of woman any longer. Indeed, I am very good natured to talk so much of this tiresome subject after I have become heartily sick of it—as I am. Lawrence, I am tired of love and of you—and wish that you would go!"

She simulated a lazy insolence and leaned back against the diagonal cushions in demure impeachment of his presence, fingering her pearls and feigning to suppress a yawn.

Lawrence watched her, fascinated with horror, a ghastly pallor upon his dark face and with eyes that now glittered icily in their blue, as if their flames had left them vitrified.

"No! By heavens, I will not go until I understand you!" he ejaculated hoarsely. "What do you mean by this? Has your conduct, your words, your looks, your love, your *promise* to me—all been a *lie*?"

"No, Lawrence. I *meant* them at the time. I have never lied," she retorted, now so thoroughly the mistress of herself that she was able to smile her sweet placatory smile. "I assure you I never lie. I am never sincere enough to lie. I say whatever I think or feel at the moment and if the next moment contradicts or changes it—there is nothing to blame but the insincerity of all life and human nature. No one is sincere but the self-hypnotized, the imbecile or the dead. Life is insincerity as much as art is. My efforts to be sincere have proved to me my unalterable insincerity. I always express fully the impressions of the moment; and yet in doing so, never once in my life have I been able to rid myself of the feeling that I do not mean a word or act that I have just said

or done. Then what is sincerity? How is it possible to attain sincerity? The more sincere we are in our expressions the more room we create in our souls for the new influences that will contradict them. We develop through consciousness of our insincerities. For instance, you and I have believed in love so much that it has made us both untrustworthy in it. In short, Lawrence, we have talked so much about love that my inspiration to act it out has been destroyed."

"Love!" he muttered with the bitterness of despair, "the word is mockery on your lips."

"On the contrary, I am sincere in recognizing its value. I find it is the only preservative of youth in women and of the primitive in men to-day. Its emotionality is absolutely essential as the salt in modern life which will preserve our hearts from withering completely under the upas of the brain, and gives us a salutary way of acting the fool. You are quite right, Lawrence, to rate love so highly. Life would be very

dull for men if they did not love, and very dull for women if they were not loved. And that is the gist of the whole matter to my mind. You have found the best that love had to yield in loving me, and I have had its best, its finest savors, in permitting your devotion. Beyond what we have had—there is only disappointment, satiety, reactions, ennui and disgust for you, and much worse for me. I am kind, Lawrence, in all my unkindness in telling you this—for it will save us both from more tragic folly. . . . Yes, listen to me now, and I will be more sincere with you than I have ever been before in my life. I will stir up all the most hidden dregs of my nature to reveal to you, and save you from the love you have for me. I will be honest and truthful, at last, I promise, and tell you of love exactly as it appears to a woman like myself—and to millions like me, without my psychological gift but with some of woman's modern mentality. Well, then, first of all, I will tell you that I am aware of love as of the

one thing which, since time immemorial, has destroyed a woman's supremacy and charm. Free from love in ourselves we are all virgin Brunhildes, enrapturing all men, but once we are mastered by our Siegfrieds, we become weak, powerless and stupid like all other women. To love, is the one and only fatality to women. Therefore throughout the ages, they have unconsciously sought to render themselves incapable of it. We *rare* women—who are supremely dowered with charm—have conquered all possibility of it in ourselves. And yet we have the richest nature in sensibility and thought. Goethe is the only great writer who has perceived an inkling of the truth I am telling you, judging from his remark that—'a woman's greatest misfortune is not to be charming when she loves.' Love is really the most unbecoming of passions to women. That is why beautiful women, when possessed of intelligence and vanity, never love, but only lend themselves to be loved. Plain women love and

sometimes the beauty after she realizes herself to be *passée*, and sick women and degenerate women love—for all these ask from love egoistic values which their deficiencies make them desire. But the sound, normal, happy, *perfect* feminine creature *never* loves. It is her function to be admired or loved, but if she reciprocates, she loses both admiration and love. Human nature only admires the intact and love is disintegrative to a woman. In love, woman betrays nature and 'nature is abominable' as Baudelaire says. Society and morality are founded upon humanity's conquest of nature in itself. Therefore the woman who loves not only becomes the scapegoat of nature, carrying all its burdens and travail, but becomes the scapegoat of society also, unless the man she loves happens to legalize her surrender to him—something that is really opposed to the nature of her love which above all else craves self-immolation. That is why I would not permit myself to love even though I possessed the

qualities necessary for it. And I have a will power which *you* at least should know, can conquer anything within myself. Fortunately for the world nearly all women have conquered romantic love in themselves. We women are all born very old. We are all equipped with the lessons of the past. And throughout the past, women have been denied all personal initiative, fancy, choice, and even candor in love, until now the function is quite aborted, perverted or atrophied in them. Emotions that are concealed are weakened and finally destroyed like plants kept in the dark. And women have been forced by public opinion during all the centuries, to conceal their hearts so effectually that it is now quite natural that they should have none; or that—when one does accidentally possess a heart—it is an unsound thing. I have none at all. That is why I am so charming. And all the really charming women in society that I know, are the same. Instead of the heart we have ambition, and our lusts and appetites are

merely for—power. But this has achieved a curious result in us: we women, so incapable of love, are yet always capable of a counterfeit of it—which sometimes even fools us ourselves into believing that we do love—the man of Success. Have you never noticed this? It is a spiritual peculiarity of ours that we can always love or believe we love the man of notable worldly success. This nature has been created in woman by the past, when she had no way of distinguishing one man from another except by the victory one suitor attained over the other in tooth and nail or stone-hatchet combats. She first showed her love of success then by rewarding the victorious one with herself. And to this day, woman loves nothing so much as success in a man. And after all this trait accords with what everybody calls her finest and highest function: maternity. Its instinct is what warns and sways her to select the one who can furnish security and provision for the nest and the brood, whose shadow lies forever upon a

woman's mind even though she exorcises its fulfillments from her life and being. Yes, it is her maternity which makes woman the arch-worshipper of worldly success, of material grandeur and security. Then can it be called unnatural or reprehensible? On the contrary, it makes the woman who marries for wealth the one who is truest to her womanhood (and you will notice that she is the woman who is most admired and liked by her own sex) and makes the woman who marries for a portionless love or—still *true* to love—gives herself without marriage, a traitor to her sex who punish her accordingly. Women have always leagued against love, for they scent in it their enemy. The modern girl one sees everywhere in quest of the millionaire, does not deserve the opprobrium given her by the social reformers, for she is in reality the normal sound feminine being, and the girls who marry beneath them, sometimes eloping with their father's grooms and chauffeurs, are the degenerates. I tell you

all this, Lawrence, in order to make clear to you why—*first* I fear the ruination of love to woman too much to let myself love you, and secondly why I would consider myself a traitor to my world and a degenerate in my nature if I gave myself to any man who could not aggrandize my power and success in life. *You* could not do so. And that has been my talisman protecting me from love—with you. You could only drag me down from the position I occupy through what another man has given me. You have no wealth, and you have ruined all possibility of the position you *might* have made for yourself, by the foolish deed to which I thoughtlessly dared you. I cannot respect you after such a folly, much less entrust my life or self to you in any way. My friend, you have very much of the child and the fool in your composition, and have the one quality that wrecks *all* success in life—faith in human nature. The greatest favor I could confer upon you would be to destroy it. Have I done so? . . . Ah, I

can see already that you hate and despise me! You are at last disenchanted! You see me as I am! You look as if you could kill me but I am not afraid of you. For your own salvation, I have unmasked myself. There is humiliation and disgrace in being unmasked, but in unmasking one's self there is supreme Triumph!"

And she laughed her luxurious laugh—the laughter which made her small teeth between the lips, swollen from his kisses, seem curiously, wickedly, animal as though they were milk teeth whose infantility had been stained by a carnivorous precocity.

"You have a heart—and it is a stone—a snake—poison!" he cried, shuddering from head to foot beneath her affected laughter after the frozen rage in which he had forced himself to listen to the end.

"No, if I have a heart—it is a cancer. For I have revealed it in order to disenchant you exactly as Signora Ambrosia revealed the cancer in her bosom to her lover, Raymond Lully,

in order to disenchant and be rid of him forever. Do you remember the story?"

And instantly illumined by the morbid fantasy of the simile, she was about to relate to him the old Romance of mediæval times when she found herself alone. Lawrence was gone.

CHAPTER XI

THE successful termination of her romance with Lawrence, appeared to Sabille as a matter for self-gratulation and complacency until she relived it all again that night in one of her rare spells of insomnia.

The bright daylight never harbored any fears or discomforts for her. But the night, the vast, empty impenetrable night, always affected her strangely, and filled her with disquietude and shapeless anxieties when her acute senses refused to deaden themselves in sleep.

The night following her interview with Lawrence, became one of particular acuity in thought and feeling. She saw his face before her in the exaggerated visioning of the night; his face as it had looked the final moment before he left her so precipitately, and it im-

pressed her as something unseen in the day because belonging to the nights of human life in its spirit of tragedy, of unprobed gloom, threat, and prowling danger.

She saw him thus as if for the first time. It was as if he too had been disguised from her until the moment of his departure, the moment which at last revealed him to her in that tragic face—betraying a spirit grown coldly desperate in its thwarted passion.

And in the lustral gloom of the night, she began to fear him with a sensation of vague mysterious terror.

He had not gone from her life. His spasmodic departure was not final. He still stood in her pathway as an obstacle, an inescapable incubus, a menace, whose stealth and refinement of horror permeated the darkness in which she now gasped, stricken by sudden alarm.

She lay awake until the icy stencilling of dawn began to pencil itself around and through the interstices of the draperies over the windows,

thinking and thinking; until in the qualm of a curious surmise—born from her intense cogitation about him—she arose and went downstairs to the library on its mystic errand.

She took down the atlas from the shelf of encyclopedic volumes, and kneeling upon the floor, she sought in it the map of the place where Lawrence once told her he had been born and spent his youth. It so happened that the name of his birthplace was all he had ever revealed to her of his life prior to the time of their collision of destinies; his reticence not being prompted by any desire for concealment—as Sabille knew—but merely by the lack of interest it contained for him in its antecedents. He had so often told her that his whole existence had been exclusively in the impersonal realm of ideas and work until—he met her; and then, all of a sudden, life had become surcharged with the personal to him, the maniacally personal, devolving around her alone.

But in the terror of mystery encompassing his

form to-night, in the new guise of him as an antagonized stranger, an unknown being malefic from injury—she felt impelled to investigate all that she had hitherto ignored about him; to seek enlightenment in following every clue, no matter how fragmentary, to his identification with some past that would forecast the future.

With nothing but this wary prophetic sense inspiring the quest, Sabille sought in the atlas the name and locality of his birthplace, Guthrie, in the Far West. And then, the spark of vague suspicion flamed into the conviction that this man bore within his being some vestige of consanguinity to that vanishing race whose domain was within the State of his birthplace.

She verified it by dwelling upon the memory of his dark complexion, his straight stern features, his fearless foreign glances, all his open-air-like noble oddities and pagan passions. Were they not sufficient evidence to verify the taint in his blood?

As she convinced herself, she superstitiously

interpreted the impulse that had led her to this discovery, and an icy chill ran over her.

She was warned!

To know a thing is to be armed against it.

At last she knew the spirit that confronted her in Lawrence Ilford and the inevitability of its revenge upon her as upon one who had injured it.

The race to which he belonged never pardons, never forgets, never obliterates. Its spirit is that of the sleuth, Nemesis, pursuing unto eternities its enemies.

The atlas fell from her hands, her teeth chattered, and she shivered within the warmth of the swansdown wrapper donned over her filmy night-robe.

She ascended to her room through the silent halls of the sleeping house, with a fear haunted footfall—to lie awake in a clammy perspiration the remainder of the night, wondering what unheard of deed, or unimaginable fantasy of torture would be contrived as the revenge of this

man whose last look upon her was one of inexpressible condemnation.

The unnerving of the night made her ill the next day—or, at least, to fancy she was so sufficiently to remain in the seclusion of her bedroom, to summon a doctor, who pronounced it an extreme case of nervous prostration and ordered the care of two nurses and a severe regime of quiet.

She cozened herself in the security of her sheltered solitude and immunity from all exterior forces until on the third day the doctor came and found his patient arisen and gone, in spite of all attempted prevention, to a reception she suddenly remembered and desired to attend.

Her own world proved restorative. Its whirlwind activities and diversions quickly dishevelled her conviction of the deleterious night, and dimmed the memory of the spirit she feared until it seemed a mere chimera belonging to some fugitive, fevered dream.

Finally Lawrence seemed gone from her life. Pacific waters closed over his storm-tossed head. The days wore themselves out swiftly and lightly until a month had passed since the day of their parting, when suddenly her mind was recalled to him.

One evening while about to dress for a ball, a parcel was brought to her addressed in Lawrence's handwriting.

Wildly impatient, she undid the parcel to find its contents a book entitled "Le Vice Suprême" by Péladan.

There was no note, mark or other sign from him, but the unmistakable handwriting was sufficient to designate the sender, and to make Sabille now relinquish everything to fling herself upon the lounge and read the book from cover to cover as rapidly and skimmingly as possible to grasp the hidden import of its embassy.

She finished it.

She could not mistake the meaning he must have sought to convey in sending her this ter-

rible book of the Latin Decadence. He had revenged himself by this insult to her.

It was the first time in her life that any man had ever ventured to insult her, but in the midst of her mounting indignation, there came a peculiar sadness as of disillusionment.

This was the sort of revenge she might expect from one of the paltry natures of her own sphere but not from Lawrence Ilford. It was a society vendetta. It belonged to the mental stilettoing of the drawing-room. It was so paltry, so commonplace, so vulgar. And from him, it was incredible. She had imagined him solely capable of terrific deeds—even in revenge—deeds whose sheer superhumanness would make them partake of a certain nobility.

And as she felt her heart sink with this curious disappointment while her cheeks burned with the smart of the insult, she realized that she had retained an unconscious ideal of Lawrence which the sending of this book at last destroyed. With its demolition, every trace of

her strange fear of him disappeared, and in its place stirred only some complex desire for retaliation.

The incident seemed to liberate her suddenly from some shadowy hold in her soul never before divined. She felt free as she had never felt before. All the effervescence of her spirit broke loose afresh, and a few hours later responded with elation to the glad clamor of the music and pleasure-busied throngs in the ball-room.

Here she was in her native element. She was vibrant in sympathy with every law and foible of this world. She loved its laughter which seemed so meaningless, and yet served the great purpose of forcing everyone to hide his wounds lest they too be jested with; she loved its conspiracy for cheer that would tolerate no display of failure, weakness, illness, the defeated of fate, or any dismal skeleton of truth in its minuets and mirth, but made everyone smile and please, with an incense-laden breath offered up

to the worth of life and each other—when blessed by the great god, Success.

Nothing mattered to Sabille now but this world of lights, melodies, luxuries, festivals and forgettings—and she felt that she was the Bride of the World to-night, reborn, unworn, full-flowered for its embrace and kisses of nepenthe.

Her loveliness attracted all eyes. She was like the vision of a living pearl. She wore a dress that looked as if its glimmering tissue had been spun from a liquid pearl and with her ropes of pearls pendant from her throat over the lace that nested her bosom, the colorless splendor of her form enhanced the glorified dusk of her eyes and the ruby savors of her cheeks and mouth.

The ballroom and vast halls were so crowded with a continual flux of people and bewilderment of movement that it was late in the night before Sabille noticed among them the presence of Lawrence Ilford.

He stood in the group of spectators near the

doorway, watching the dancers in the cotillion that was just beginning. Sabille was about to take part in it when she saw him. Their eyes met, and a grim irony tinged the smile on his lips as he bowed to her slightly. She felt herself growing pale. She remembered the insult of the book.

"What is the matter?" her companion exclaimed, noticing her sudden pallor and her eyes fixed in meditative distraction.

"I see someone to whom I desire to speak. Pardon me a moment, wait here for me and I will return directly."

She hurried away to where Lawrence stood, her little nostrils dilated, her eyes scintillant with spite as she approached him.

"So you have tried to insult me with that odious book!"

"Not at all, Madam," he rejoined coldly, his eyes upon her as steady and passionless as an eagle's. "You mistake its purpose. I sent it merely to let you know that I *can* understand

the species to which you belong, and that my study of you is not yet ended!"

"Not yet ended!"

"I am studying you now with a scientific observation no longer obscured by any *personal* interest. For my own intellectual satisfaction I desire to trace out your significance, to classify and *label* you!"

"And pray how will you have the opportunity since I shall never speak to you again?"

"You will see!"

There was such a sinister threat in his light blue eyes, cutting as steel, and it was so mystifying to see that face, bereft of all its former life for her, and hard as stone, that she recoiled in every fibre from the aggression of her approach into the vague terror of him she had believed subjugated. Without another word, she turned away and returned to her partner of the dance.


Thereafter the presence of Lawrence in that room seemed to rob it of air and filled her with

a heavy sense of oppression and a dim foreboding she could not cast off in spite of her efforts to be gayer than ever.

She did not permit her eyes to wander near the direction where she had discovered Lawrence among the spectators, but she felt his basilisk surveillance throughout the remainder of the hours until it became so late that she felt assured he must have gone and drew a breath of relief.

It was long past midnight when she left the ballroom and descended to the vestibule for her car. An open-sided awning stretched over the strip of carpet from the vestibule to the curbstone, beside which stood groups of footmen with faces muffled high in their fur collars, for the night was bitterly cold. As Sabille appeared one of them stepped forth, and made a summons in the street which brought her landau to the curb almost immediately.

She rushed through the blustering winds that stung her silk-shod ankles, revealed in all their



slim grace beneath her close-held wrap, and into the door, held open by the footman who then closed it and sprang upon the box beside the chauffeur.

The car sped along swiftly, more swiftly than she was accustomed to being driven, and then she noticed that it was going in an opposite direction from that which led to her home.

She lifted the speaking tube and called through it to the chauffeur, but he took no notice of it and the car sped swiftly on. Then she tried to open one of the windows, but found them immovably fastened. She did not dare open the door because of the speed at which they were travelling, so she leaned back dazed with astonishment to wait until the car slackened its speed or reached its unknown destination.

The possibility of her chauffeur's intoxication was the explanation that flashed upon her, until suddenly certain unfamiliarities in the interior arrested her attention and she discovered that

she was not in her own car at all but through some error had entered a strange one almost identical in external appearance with her own. The men on the box were so concealed by the bear skin furs pulled high on their faces and with fur caps pulled low, that no recognition of them was possible. Therefore the mistake had been theirs. The footman had mistaken her for someone else.

With this solution of the vexatious occurrence her uneasiness was allayed, and she resigned herself to wait patiently until the end of the journey when the men could be informed of their error and drive her back to her own residence.

How far they went!—outside the fashionable limits, through squalid side streets, and then beside the East River where the gaunt darkness was flecked with the twinkling trails of the bridges spanning the waters—a liquid likeness of the night—and the far-off shores were like a fallen Pleiades.

At last they turned into a side street and half way through the deserted block, the car abruptly stopped.

Before Sabille could summon her wits to her aid, so instantaneously did it all happen, the two men sprang at the same time from the box, opened the door, grasped her as she started to scream and threw something dark over her head that stifled her. Almost insensible from fright, she felt herself being carried up several flights of stairs and put down gently by the ruffian arms which were then withdrawn from her body.

The muffling cloth was removed from her head and she found herself facing Lawrence Ilford who stood coolly before her. They were alone.

"I beg your pardon for the methods I have been compelled to resort to, in order to bring you here," he said, with a courtesy so exaggerated it became sarcasm. "But it was the only way. My plans have succeeded admirably

so far, and there is no doubt but that the aim of them will be as successfully attained. You are now completely in my power. We are as alone here as though we were in the Libyan desert."

She glanced about the room.

It was a vast, obscurely lit room which had the character of a work room of some kind. Its ceiling was low, the walls bare except for some portions that were covered with shadowy machinery, its floors uncarpeted, its only signs of habitability in some wooden chairs and the decrepit leather couch upon which she sat—otherwise containing only the mysterious forms of apparatus and implements peculiar to the work conducted here which made it appear to her as a sort of factory room or laboratory.

He saw and answered the look in her eyes.

"First of all let me assure you that you have nothing to fear from my past passion for you. You have nothing to fear from it—because it is dead. You have killed it as completely as you have killed every human emotion in me, and I

face you now as we would face each other across our own graves. I wish you to understand this thoroughly. The purpose for which you are here to-night is to be *judged* by me as you would be judged if you were in reality—dead. One has no right to judge another until his soul is dead to love and hate. You have made me thus. You have destroyed the human in me. It has become my right and my duty in life to be your judge. A judge is the vicegerent of God."

He addressed her with a calm detachment of manner more appalling than any anger or hostility would have been, and in a voice whose suave solemnity seemed studied by rote and implacable in its changeless poise. His countenance was like a graven image of Indifference. He was a Jove without thunderbolts, but more terrifying in his quiet and urbane fixity of purpose than tempestuousness could have been. Sabille was trembling.

"A month ago to-day, Sabille, we had that

conversation in your home in which *you* held all the power, and made me listen to you while you destroyed me with every word—as lightly as a child plucks away a butterfly’s wings. You had led me on and on to lay my naked bleeding heart at your feet, and when at last it was given you, you saw no more in it than a toy which must be crippled or killed for pleasure with the blithe wickedness of a child. You are a child in your moral immaturity and yet your intellect debars you from possessing the guiltlessness of a child, for you deliberately seek the pain and ruination you can wreak, with a *knowledge* that incriminates you. There are some natures that seem born only to tear off the wings from other natures. Our ideals and our faith in human nature are these wings. Without them—we grovel. You have torn them from me and——”

He hesitated, paused a moment and then resumed with a change of tone:

“There! I have ended with that. I shall



speak no more of myself in relation to you. I must deal with you as an impersonal being who holds a significance for others and for the world as great as that which you once had for me. . . . Sabille, your entire and only personal significance consists in the fact that you are one of those human beings who play with all the great powers of life, and so turn them to evil since undirected by your will to the good. Every power that is not specifically used for good becomes evil. Can I make you see and understand this? That is my first purpose to-night. You, like the rest of humanity, believe only in the evil that is concrete and visible, and in your earth-blindness do not realize that all the suffering and crime of the world to-day is moral and not physical. But I tell you now that a society as well as an individual which destroys the moral and spiritual best in others should be looked upon and considered as a murderer. You, Sabille, are one of the instruments of such a society. You deserve its name.

Ah, a terrible word, you think, to apply to one like you who, in your own view, has no aim in life but to amuse yourself! You fancy that your levity exonerates you from any imputation of *evil*, but it so happens that it is just such a spirit—so gay, light and irresponsible, seeking nothing but its own pleasure—which has created all the misery, slavery and bloody revolutions in the world. Such a spirit devours human lives, human minds, human souls, and giving nothing from its own life, mind or soul, it becomes a monstrous thing, a *lusus naturæ*, stalking the earth with its reaper, Pleasure, and mowing down countless millions to degradation. Has it never occurred to you to think what a crime it is to take and take forever and ever, and never to give? That is your social crime, Sabille, but you are responsible for another still greater. I shall speak now of your personal crime, the supreme one before which all others pale: your crime to Love. To yourself and to others you are a criminal of Love.

You were made for love, you can command it wheresoever you will. And how do you use your sovereign power? You awaken love only to destroy it. You call love to come to you and then in fulsome welcome you stab it with arrant knavery. You use your beauty to arouse ideals which you doom, simultaneously in secret, to destruction. If your appearance gave any hint of the character it contained, your power for evil to others would be foiled. But no. You are wondrously fashioned to promise everything. To know you is to see the promise of every fulfilment of the heart, the mind and the soul. Beauty is a promise of heaven. It is the virtue of matter. It leads whomsoever and wheresoever it wills—like some visualized magnetism of man's highest dreams. A terrible power! Simply because it is a covenant with love.

"Love is the Cosmic force and whosoever destroys it in another or in himself commits the great crime, the Unpardonable Sin,

for he upsets the anthropocentric process of the Worlds.

"Yes; love is the one stupendous power of life, and the clue to all the mysteries and greatnesses in the human soul. Sabille, I do not mean religion's ideals of love, the dehumanized passions in which it has severed the spirit from the flesh and made man's life a disgrace and his thought of the only great love possible to him, a disease. No. I mean the great love of the sexes. It is the one great æsthetico-moral agency for the elevation of human nature and the salvation of the world. Ridiculed, despised, deformed, vitiated, as it now is, it is the future arch-angel for our worship. Through it alone can the spiritual expand and integrate itself with the physical, which it will redeem. It alone can achieve the universal beauty of appearance, the social health, happiness and strength of humanity. And just so far as we have warped it from its pristine purity and power, we have warped our hearts and dis-

eased our minds. It is a strange and grievous thing to see how man has given distrust, shame, viciousness to the force that underlies his own and the world's nature, and which demands to be beautified, ennobled, apotheosized—else humanity runs in a circle stinging itself to death with its own poison like a scorpion when terrified. All the elective forces, astronomical, chemical, biological, which Schopenhauer believed were identical with the human will, I tell you are identical with sex passions; that is—in its *perfect* form, which, mutilated and degraded as it has been throughout the centuries, we so rarely have seen, and the average person is now totally incapable of. In its perfect form, in its true nature, it embodies all the ideal qualities which priestcraft has appropriated to religion, and yet embraces also the earth. Only the human arms of love can emparadise the soul within the Finite, and the sensualities of love deaden the loneliness of the heart and the longings of the mind for the Un-

attainable. Sex is the axle to every wheel of life. The creative power of the imagination depends wholly upon it. In the realm of intellect it leads to the arts, or to mechanical inventions and scientific discoveries. And in the moral realm also everything exists through it: character, temperament, strength of will. Even in your sphere of fashion, *Sabille*, which seems to have eradicated the *human* from its impulses, it is sole arbiter of all its manifestations: vanity, imitation, desire to please and be pleased, adornment, the multiform pursuits of novelty to attract and be attracted. And like all great powers—when not used specifically for good—it produces evil. There is an intrinsic evil in every great good. I believe it is rooted in the nature of God himself. Everything rots, withers or empoisons itself, if it be not given a vigilant tendence of care and direction. Only by concentrating the mysterious influences of life into a definite good can we prevent them from the disintegration of evil. This

is the quintessential secret of all enigmas. And thus it is that love which is not expressed, but is denied, thwarted, cast back upon itself or destroyed—becomes the source of all the corruption and brutalization in the human mind and nature.

“Do you at last begin to realize the nature of the crime you have committed? Has it never occurred to you that you could not awaken to life all the great slumbering forces in the human soul without owing something to that life? Did you fancy that the caprice of your will could destroy all effects from the terrific causes it could set in motion? Have you never suspected the stupendous character of the things with which you have so wantonly played—like a petroleuse?

“Such conduct as yours is not only murderous itself but it has the power of creating the instinct of murder in others. Human beings seek to kill in others what they have had killed in themselves. Those who have had destroyed

the beauty and faith of their souls retaliate by destroying them in others. And listen and learn a still more dire thing, Sabille, a hideous fact which as yet science hides from all but the initiated in its knowledge: every natural passion that is defeated from a physical expression turns to some form of *necrophilism in the mind*. Ah, you do not understand the term! It is one of those veils of scientific nomenclature which are used to conceal truths considered too shocking for human nature yet to bear. I will not make it any clearer to you, except to say that it reveals us as physiological creatures in whom the body creates the mind. When denied the body, love animalizes the brain with conscious or unconscious needs of destruction, violence, bloodshed, or unnatural *loves of death*, in many forms. Defeated passions make suicides and homicides on the physical plane and on the moral plane their equivalents in thought. Sabille, have I at last made you understand your crime? Then, I ask you what

can be an adequate punishment for such a crime?"

She began to sob.

"Sabille, you are to be punished. Justly punished for your crime, but remember *not* for what you have done to *me*. A judge does not punish from a spirit of revenge, but in order to mete justice to the culprit and equalize the balance of life so that the one who has done wrong will suffer it, and thus expiate, change, redeem, develop himself through the pain of self-realization."

"Lawrence——" But she could not speak.

"After long reflection I have found a way to mete justice to you, and have found the only punishment *befitting* your crime. I will not keep you longer in suspense, but will explain what it is to be—as quickly and simply as I can. . . . Do you see the objects in this room? They are the scientific instruments in the surface of one great power of nature—that of

Radio-activity. It is the similitude of the power with which you have *played*. It is the chemism of the elements that burn in the human soul as—love. Little is known, even by science, of either of these supreme powers whose dominion of matter radiates the world, but both are known to be alike in this: they are malignant forces when they are denied a specific purpose of good. I have just made clear to you what love does when denied itself. And doubtless you who are so clever, have read of the malignant physiological effects in science's latest discovery, the radio-active properties, if their evil is not neutralized by directions that extract only its good. This mysterious property of matter—only now dawning upon science and destined to revolutionize all its knowledge—is already known to possess the power of revealing the secrets of the body, of penetrating and unveiling the innermost arcana of the living organism, of being a marvelous curative agency for the human flesh which

also it can burn, poison, torture, kill, destroy. Is it not thus the similitude of the power of love?

“Sabelle, do you remember that last day of ours together when you uttered the name of what you said your heart was—for *me*? Ah, I see you remember. Then it will not be necessary for me to repeat the word. But in that second of its utterance you pronounced the name of what your punishment and brand of criminality is going to be, the name of what I know these powers of Radio-activity—imprisoned in that object over yonder—can be used in such a way as to inflict upon the human flesh. Do you *now* understand? I have learned through science how I can brand upon you the *reality* of what you named as a symbol. In its malignance upon your bosom, you will behold your own evil, in its unhealable, unescapable torture, you will realize all the degradations, mortifications, agonies and destructions of the human flesh, until it becomes sacred to you—

and makes you become at last *human* through the fellowship of Life's Masonry of Pain!"

He made as if he were going toward the object he had designated, when Sabille cried out, ran to him and threw herself at his feet.

"Oh, Lawrence, Lawrence—I love you, I love you! Take me. I am yours. Do with me as you will. You are my lord, my master, my god!"

CONSCIENCE

CONSCIENCE

THE gaiety of criminals upon their way to the scaffold has often struck, amazed, bewildered their observers. None have understood it. Most have fancied it a mask adopted by the lost soul in a final defiance flung at mankind: defiance which is the pride of the fallen. But I—a criminal condemned to death to-morrow—am experiencing this gaiety, and will reveal how it has come to me.

And why do I do this? Why trouble myself to give anything to a world whose laws I have always despised?

Because my experience has been so unique, unparalleled, incredible, that I, in my pride of defiance, desire to fling in the face of the world its ignorance of the human heart.

I have won a victory. My gaiety tells me so.

The whole world is in quest of gaiety. It hates the gray. It hates its aches. Fallen into the shadow, it squirms to reach the light. It denies its pain and wants to laugh like a drunkard: idiot laughter that comes not from the gaiety but from the ache of the heart. For the soul is not gay until it has opened and filled with all the suffering and sin the world can bestow upon it. Its gaiety is its fearlessness. This I shall prove.

I do not pretend to understand the cause or rationale of my deeds, but I do understand the thoughts and feelings that have prompted them; and I shall relate them faithfully, completely, shamelessly, so that those whose minds are curious about the human heart can peer into these hitherto unlit corners before they make their sweeping synthesis of man.

I will show them where their research has never probed. I will open a vista of surmise

to them which will wither their conceit of understanding. It fattens my gaiety to think that, some day, they—the thinkers—will say of me: "This, too, was a man."

To begin at the beginning.

I had the good or the ill fortune (who can ever say which?) to be born into a family distinguished for its piety and held in the highest regard by the community in which its members had always dwelt. I remember that I sometimes wondered if the cold and rigid armor of their respectability did not weigh upon them. It seemed to me that they lived in a perpetual vigil against any infringement of the laws of man, and that the importance of their self-guardianship and of their neighbors' jurisdiction made them featureless and sad. What made them so anxious to march with the world in its lockstep of safety? Had they something in their hearts to conceal? Unfortunately, so far, the world has never been given the confessions of the virtuous. Only the evil confess;

and the virtuous are always dull and the evil are often gay.

I had the advantage of an excellent education under the ægis of a college whose curriculum embodied instruction in morals, ethics, and the dogmas of its faith, far in excess of the usual scholasticism to be gleaned in an American academy. Yet what knowledge I gained was merely engrafted, superficially, upon me; for, being without mental desire or curiosity, it soon fell away, a thing without foothold.

An indifferent student, I dragged through college, often escaping severe punishment and even expulsion, merely because of the seeming willingness, patience and affability of my nature; qualities which I learned to cultivate, to an excessive degree, as soon as I discovered their value in placating or diverting the ire of the authorities.

Yes, I early learned the value of being a gentleman. If one be endowed with the appearance of a gentleman (upon my high bred looks

I have always prided myself, even in my lowest degradation) and adds to it suave manners, soft tones, gentle, deprecating ways and words,—one can frustrate the suspicion and hostility of the world. But these qualities can only be developed and utilized by those who are sufficiently *indifferent* to do so; for from the profound indifference of mind and heart, they spring.

Through my childhood, youth and early manhood, the one thing that characterized me and stands in my memory as the very color, in fact, of my inner natural self, was—indifference.

Beware of the indifferent. Of those who seem devoid of ambition and appetite, of those whose eyes never sparkle with a lust of success, of love, of work, of knowledge, of gold, of those who never have a rash impetuous youth nor make the mistakes of passion, which are after all but the expansiveness of a warm humanity within, unable to form itself into

strength and value until bruised into shape by the iron of the outer world. Beware of the indifferent; for indifference is not strength; it is not stoicism nor self-sufficiency and mastery—for which it is so generally mistaken: no; it is the swamp of the spirit. Like a bog it hangs upon the nature, destroys all springing and sound growths to throw its succulent shade over the breeding of glazed unvital things, laggard serpentine things, mucous, swollen, stinging things. Beneath indifference grows the ill health, the abnormality and the wickedness of the human soul.

But the world likes, admires, trusts and follows those who are indifferent to it—as they must be indifferent to all else. The prizes of life are for those who do not prize them. And to this alone do I attribute my early success in life.

I cannot deny that I was singularly fortunate in gaining the esteem of men and the material weal of life, up to the time of—well, it is diffi-

cult to say just when it began, but as a distinctive epoch which marked my career, I will say—my marriage.

I had left college, several years, and was filling a position that was a subordinate one, to be sure, and not very remunerative, but was one of public trust with inevitable opportunities for advancement, when I decided to entrench myself still further into settlement in life through marriage.

Naturally the idea of a home allured me more than that of a wife. Men of the indifferent temperament invariably do marry for a home. If they possess any ideal at all it is that of peace, quiet and the shelter from all foreign things, which somehow has come to be associated with the idea of home.

Love was nothing to me. To this day I neither know nor care if my wife ever loved me. But although I did not harbor any of those bemeaning feelings, politely termed sentiment, I must admit that my choice of her for

a wife was actuated by the charm she exercised over me through her possession of a pair of extraordinarily beautiful hands.

Never have I seen anything so beautiful as Nellie's hands. And I am a man singularly unsusceptible to beauty in any of its forms.

Her hands were similar to those one sees in Sir Peter Lely's portraits of the 17th century *grandes dames*. They looked as though solely made to languish amidst silken splendors, to "trail fringes and embroidery through meadows and purling streams," to caress the creamy wool of a lamb, emblem of innocence, to toy with nothing heavier than a shepherdess's crook or the chain of a pet falcon. Aristocratic, slender, exquisitely white hands, from whose shell-tinted palms branched five pointed fingers, as nervous, flexible, vital, all feeling, as though they were the very antennæ of her soul. Ah, most rarely lovely, once were Nellie's hands!

During the days of our courtship they fasci-

nated and absorbed me completely. I never extended to her any caress beyond holding one of them, and losing myself in long studious contemplation of its flowerlike charm.

She, too, may have been cold and indifferent. I know little about her even after I have lived with her these past eight years. She never exacted or seemed to expect from me any form of endearment. But often she smiled at me, and her pale blue eyes seemed tender when she consented to become my wife.

Our home was in the suburbs of a large town. All around it ranged little plots of similar homes, small, simple, commonplace as our own.

I believe that at first Nellie was happy. At least I heard her sometimes singing at her work. She had insisted upon performing without assistance all the household duties of our little *ménage*; and this in spite of the fact that I could have afforded a servant for her and that all our neighbors could boast of one. But

her ambition never took the form of display or of emulation with others; ambitious though she was in her own way. Her ambition, as she said, was to save sufficient money to secure us against any possibility of future want; and from the very start she was solicitous about every dollar of my earnings, and unnecessarily denied herself various comforts, in order to manipulate as many of both as possible into that visionary armory of protection which she was constantly building against some mysterious attack of the Future.

At first I experienced much satisfaction in my home. It afforded such a tranquilizing contrast to the tumultuous city wherein I spent the entire day, that I looked forward to my return in the evenings with a real pleasure. The little house was embedded amidst a nest of trees from whose bosky darkness it threw forth the beacon of its evening light to greet me immediately upon my descent from the train. To that genial harborage I always hastened, to

spend the ensuing hour in the relaxing comfort of smoking and watching Nellie as she moved about the kitchen in preparation of our supper.

I found it singularly pleasing to watch her deft and dainty hands perform those homely rites. At first it seemed so incongruous: those hands of a seventeenth century great lady, solely fashioned to be idle, pensive and frivolous, grasping wooden and iron ladles, holding the sputtering grill over the boisterous fire, plunging into hectic ovens, gripping their little pink nails into the greasy scour-cloths with which she wiped out the black pots or pans, and burying themselves beyond their slim blue-veined wrists within the leaden water that filled the sink as they searched in its depths for the slippery china.

It was indeed fascinating to watch her hands. It formed my sole diversion, and seemed for awhile to fill my life with the charm of a beauty to which I was strangely insensible and unappreciative, and yet vaguely held by it

alone within the inviolate precincts of this home.

As I say, I do not know whether she ever loved me or I loved her. Those sentimentalities, which so slavishly preoccupy the minds of others, never assumed any importance to me. In fact it has always appeared absurd to me that a man should name as sentiment that which is but the trickery of an unacknowledged instinct, and seek to exalt his own life by means of a passion so cunningly devised to diminish it in making him share it with or bestow it upon others. But this is a subject upon which I must not dwell, for it does not materially concern the subsequent events of my fate.

My wife was always thinking of the future. Whatever emotions or thoughts she was capable of, seemed to be wholly expended upon it. She was always solicitous, cautious and anxious about it; and in those days never mentioned or discussed anything else. She was constantly forecasting it and planning and wor-

rying. Yes, whatever individual life she possessed appeared to be wholly projected into the morrow.

The morrow!

He who said take no thought for the morrow was the one who understood the beginning of all evil.

Because of this—her fear of the future—she became exacting and wearisome to me. I, the unaspiring, the peace-lover, the unmoved, was incessantly told what I must do, what I ought to do, what I was failing to do, wherein was my duty and my neglect. She pointed out to me the possibility of losing my position, the probability of being unable to secure another, and the dire disasters which would then befall us because of the insufficiency of our little bank fund. In anticipation she experienced every ill of poverty; and her constant endeavor was to impart to me the same meticulous frame of mind. My stolid sense of security seemed to distress her more than anything else; and she

fought against it with a relentless persistency. She tried to undermine it like some little hoarding mole who burrows hither and thither beneath a flower bed, until all suddenly collapses in rents like wrinkles upon a careworn face. She begrudged me a sense of security even in my food, and whenever I appeared to be particularly relishing some dish, would invariably speak of its expensiveness, and the unlikelihood of our being able to procure it in the future. Thus in countless petty and ingenious ways she added to the Persecution of the Future. Always she spoke to me of *our* future, but it soon appeared to me as solely her own welfare of which she was so obsessed.

An obsession it certainly was. But it did not define itself into any explicit desire or want until one day when a neighbor's wife happened to come in and mention to Nellie a life insurance policy which her husband had just taken out for her benefit in one of the big companies.

From that moment my wife fixed upon her

desire. Like a lightning flash the words of the visitor had illumined the chaos of her anxiety. Immediately upon her departure, I was told that I, too, must do as this woman's husband had done and insure my life for her. She seized upon the idea with the avid tenacity for which her long groping had evidently prepared her. At last she knew exactly what she wanted, and from that moment I had no rest.

I was not then an ill-tempered or impatient man and I endured her besetting with an equanimity at which I afterwards marveled.

Not a day of respite would she give me. She sent for circulars and particulars from all the insurance companies, both large and small, and soon we were deluged with mail that she would read aloud to me over the breakfast table. And in the evenings the exclusive topic of her discourse became comparisons between the statements and annual reports of the various companies, and comparisons between the respective merits of the different kinds of policies.

The more she learned of the subject, the more enthusiastic and urgent she became. Now impatient as well as persistent she harped upon it, she nagged, petitioned, harassed me, until, all of a sudden, I became—suspicious!

Yes, suddenly from its long sleep, my inertia stirred and from it sprang forth a dark, a sinister, a terrible suspicion.

What good could my insurance do her unless with it came my *death*? Was it then for my death that she was thus planning and hankering?

From the moment the suspicion seized upon me I lost my sluggish peace forever.

The law of self-preservation, deep hidden beneath the indifference within my breast, was aroused and armed against this parasitic thing that demanded of me—its future!

Then I could contain myself no longer. Although I did not accuse her of her design against my life nor allow her to suspect my growing conviction of it, I accused her of the

basest selfishness in thus and always thinking of her future, her security, her own well-being, even at the expense of my peace of mind.

“What good would my insurance do *me*?” I demanded of her. And then, for the first time, presented to her my point of view: the arrant selfishness of her request, when to comply with it meant for me to expend a considerable portion of my income in a way that could be of no benefit to me whatsoever, with the still more disagreeable condition it would possess of reminding me of my death every time I should be constrained to make one of the quarterly, bi-annual, or annual payments. This latter phase appeared particularly obnoxious, burdensome, insupportable to me; and as I realized how she was attempting to inflict it upon me, she became in my sight more and more culpable and offensive. Did she then desire to rob me of my peace of mind forever? If I were to be forced thus to contemplate and prepare for death, periodically, systematically,

compulsorily, throughout the year, I should be assigning my entire life to a compact with the Arch-Destroyer, which would take from it all the lightness of an irresponsible existence—all the blithe sense of freedom in mind and heart—forevermore.

And I waxed wroth the longer I dwelt upon it, and began to censure her so harshly and bitterly for her flagrant egoism, and with an anger and evident animosity, to which she was so unaccustomed from me, that it surprised her into a spell of alarmed nerves and she broke down and cried for the first time since our marriage.

She cried, while I observed with disgust how weak, foolish and homely she was. Then she suddenly gained some control over her sobs, and told me, in a breaking voice, of how cruelly I was wronging her, of how unjust I was to accuse and upbraid her for selfishness, when it was not for herself at all that she had been thus importunate. It was for another, for our

child, our unborn child, which she was carrying and feeling at that very moment as it beat like a bird in the encagement of her womb.

"It worries me, it worries me," she whispered between her sobs. "It makes my heart ache with the responsibility of its life, its future."

And she placed both her hands upon my arm and looked up at me with that dreadful wistfulness of woman which asks and asks so much from man that he cannot give nor even understand.

Silently, in return, my gaze swept over her figure and noted its dawning deformity, then was recalled to those clinging hands which I felt, with an exaggerated consciousness, upon my arm. At first I observed them with curiosity, then, with a startled wonder, then with sheer consternation, as, abruptly, I realized how they had changed.

Changed, completely changed; that there was no mistaking. How unfamiliar they

seemed in their new guise! How incredible and shocking in their transformation!

They, the erstwhile ensigns of beauty, had been replaced by strange members that dazed and daunted me with their ugliness, their unmitigated eldritch ugliness.

And I, who had always prided myself on being unmoved by beauty, became shudderingly alive to the horror of the ugliness of those hands.

I studied them in a sickening fascination. Red, coarsened, uncouth, their pores harsh as the bark on some uncanny carnivorous tree, their nails broken and spotted with white bruises,—*these* were the things that had once exercised upon me such a different fascination, that fatal fascination which had made me choose them for a lifelong affiliation. And now they had turned against me and were revealing their true character; they were mocking me with their malific ugliness, maddening me with their ominous secrets, terrifying me

with their baleful powers and threats. Cheated and betrayed by them, I was their dupe, and the dupe of this woman who was peering up into my face with such unanswerable demands, with such a tragic wistfulness.

In that poignant second of lucidity, I lost all trace of my past self. A vague wave of hostility swept through me that rendered me a stranger to myself. She, too, was suddenly a stranger, and in her new aspect was revealed as the Enemy of Man. I feared her but loathed her more than I feared. She desired my death; of this I was now convinced, and whether her desire was for her own benefit or that of the child did not change, augment, or detract in any way from the enormity of her offence. She desired my death! That was the one and only thing that mattered. She represented that woman's lust of life which will sacrifice everything, all beauty, love, peace, man, herself, for merely another embodiment of life, even though it be a wretched life; life

being the monomania of woman. Strange mystery of human existence that covenants alone with woman and yet penalizes her for her consecration!

Suddenly I felt my brain swell as with a viper's poison, and in the dizziness of a whirling second, transported beyond my own conscious powers of volition—my arm shook itself free from the repugnance of her hands and dashed its fist in full vigor against her mouth.

Never, never can I forget her cry; nor her look of bleeding horror as she fell back against a table standing in the centre of the floor. Her arms strained backwards upon it, she gazed at me with fixed dilated eyes.

Trembling, both, we gazed at each other in silence, during moments which were marked off by the ticking of the clock upon the cupboard, marked off in some punctilious greed as though they were being lapped up slowly, carefully, voluptuously by an Eternity of Hell.

Then—I know not why, it was not shame,

she was too abhorrent to me to cause shame—but I lowered my burning face and slunk away from the house with the sense that it was I who had been struck, and not she.

During the ensuing months our eyes never met. Neither did I, during that period, ever gaze at her freely and fully again. No longer did I watch her at her work, as of yore, but when at home sat smoking in morose silence or in gloomy idleness and brooding. She, too, became silent, she who had once been so loquacious. Like a pall silence enwrapped our home.

In justice to myself I must confess that, during those interminable months whilst she awaited the newcomer into our home, I was frequently tempted to speak to her and break that pall of silence. There was something about it that ached and weighed upon me like a nightmare. Formerly I had fancied that silence was peculiarly congenial to me, but during that prolonged immemorial spell of it, I

learned how awful it is, how implacable and ghastly and crushing in its unreachability—which yet reaches one in a closeness from which there is no escape. Silence is a mirror of Eternity held before the shrinking face of man. Is that not why we hate it? Is there aught more terrifying than its blankness which yet glassily magnifies us to ourselves?

Again and again I was tempted to exorcise that fatal silence from our home, but when upon the very verge of words was invariably restrained by pride. I felt that my words would have to consist of some overture or apology to her. Because of my one act of brutality, an act I could justify to myself through the abnormal excitedness of the moment, I would have to ask, perhaps sue for pardon, and to this my jealous pride would not permit me to stoop. It would be a weakness. The man of strength must never explain himself. He must be his own tribunal. Above all woman must not be led to believe that she can judge man.

I knew that my views regarding this subject were correct, and they seemed to justify my conduct of stubbornly maintained silence, until I began to feel that she owed me the initial advance, and that I, and not she, was being daily wronged by the continuation of our silence. Yes, she might have broken it as well as I. In fact it was her duty more than mine; for she, as woman, was imbued with the greater responsibility toward the unborn, and had she been worthy of the trust, would have expected nothing from me, but herself would have done everything to secure that household harmony which, like a holy amulet, would have averted from us the fell curse.

With my footsteps upon the very border of the Styx, with my last breath panting from beneath the black muffles of justice, this, I can solemnly swear: for that damnable silence which blighted our home *she* must be held chiefly to blame.

Finally the child was born.

I had been sitting alone a long time listening to the strange sounds overhead from the chamber where she lay in travail.

At last the silence of the house was broken. For deathless moments I heard her moaning; and then a havoc of cries resounded through the sepulchral walls. It seemed as though they ripped away the vampirish grip of silence upon that dwelling to leave it forever full of bleeding noise. But, no; after one culminate shriek that seemed wrung from some bottomless pit of torture, all sound subsided; and silence again reigned in that doleful domain.

I shivered in it as though from a deadly chill; I buried my face in my unstrung hands until, hours later as it seemed, someone came for me and summoned me to the chamber above wherein lay the mother and our child.

With a stupendous effort to comport myself with a natural demeanor, I accompanied the nurse, and ascended to the chamber above.

On tiptoe I approached the bed, as though fearful of again uncovering those raw wounds of cries, hidden beneath the silence; and saw her as she lay ensconced amidst the pillows, holding something small and breathing within the curve of her arm.

For the first time since months my wife and I steadily met each other's eyes. I looked down at her and she looked up at me. Her lips were quivering, and her eyes were humid as though with incipient tears: not hard covetous eyes as they had seemed to me before I struck her, nor hurt malign eyes as they had been after my blow, but, shy and benign, they looked up at me as though they might, as though they were preparing to—forgive.

But she said nothing and still seemed as though waiting for me to break the silence between us.

And why did I then recoil? Why have I always been incapacitated for a performance as soon as I have perceived it expected and

awaited from me? What bane of perversity has been the taint in my blood?

For now when I saw how easy it would be to stretch forth my hand and span the chasm between us, when I was even aware that something within me was bent upon this deed and ached for its enactment—I was unable to do so; and turned away, abruptly, in silence, and left the room to spend many hours thereafter in restless aimless wandering upon the country roads and suburban streets.

While I had stood at the bedside, and turned away, it was with the clear understanding that I was hurting myself far worse than her. And yet if it had instantaneously cost me my life I could not have refrained from the act. That act had caused in me a sort of taloned gloat of the mind as it held fast some guiltless slave, some unknown foe in my soul, which ached and gasped for liberation from the execrated thralldom. And I feared to liberate It, that aching

thing, more than I feared any deed, however heinous.

Thereafter, on to the end, I lived solely to suppress and deaden it. When it churned in my heart with its unbearable pangs, I took long prostrating walks, or concentrated my thoughts feverishly upon my daily commercial tasks; but above all I resolutely avoided that darkened chamber wherein they lay. I never reëntered it during the weeks of her convalescence. But while in the house, I found myself listening, constantly listening to catch some sound from overhead which would betoken the presence of the little stranger within its walls.

But nothing ever reached my strained ears, save the occasional footfall of the old woman who daily came to serve their needs. And I marveled at this as I recalled that babies with their inveterate crying were said to be utterly devastating to all domestic quiet.

Evidently my child did not cry; and as finally I realized this, it was with a peculiar

thrill. The fact seemed to establish its difference, aye, its superiority, to the children of others, and made me, for the first time, aware of my paternity in this thrill of anomalous relief and pride. Then at least the child would not make this atmosphere more discordant.

At last the old woman visited the house no more, and the mother and child came down to the lower floor.

My wife gradually resumed the household tasks while the child remained most of the time in its cradle with its little muslin canopy trailing on either side like broken wings.

I took more interest in them than I would acknowledge even to myself. And when Nellie was occupied or unobservant, I would slyly look at her and note how weak and thin she seemed at first and how she regained her strength and elasticity, unslackeningly, every day.

Our child appeared to be incredibly good and asserted its existence only in little kicks and

flutters of arms amidst its soft bedding, and in the periods of nursing when the sound of its sucking mouth filled the room.

But what chiefly interested, thrilled, amazed me was that she—my wife—seemed to be content, aye, positively content, even gay, during those early days after the advent of the new life.

Thus she completed my alienation. Her attitude confirmed all my harbored suspicions. For one thing, did it not prove that I counted for less than nothing in these two lives? It was only too apparent that she was endeavoring to obliterate the very consciousness of my existence from this household and was solely occupied with the thought of herself and of her child; perhaps was dreaming of their future, as a future from which the old anxiety seemed now to have been strangely abolished. Otherwise how could she look so opulent in content?

Concluding thus, I again felt fully justified in my silence; and determined to prolong it in-

definitely as her merited punishment. No longer remained the vestige of a doubt within my mind that if I had been such a fool, during those days of haranguing, as to have acceded to her desire to insure my life for her,—by this time she would have contrived for me—death!

And as I brooded I endeavored to exult in the triumphant sense of self-preservation; but no effort of will seemed adequate to cast off the fearful spell which, like a vise, still clamped down my spirits; and I can honestly declare that never in my life have I exulted in the sense of a secure freedom, until I found myself behind the hopelessness and the fearlessness of these prison bars.

The days sped by, in tongueless unmeasured hours, until there came the time when I noticed that Nellie did not move about so lightly or glibly as at first. Had the old ailment of fret again fastened upon her? Was her content but a fallacious reaction gathering itself together for fresh ravages of worry?

For I noticed her as she bent over the cradle, during long intervals, and saw that a puzzled anxiety was darkening upon her brow. Then I watched her poring in close absorption over the infant's face as she held it in her arms, sometimes crushing it to her bosom as if to absorb its identity within her own, and again extending it in her grasp, arm-length, for her singular steadfast scrutiny; then, I became suddenly aware that the mysterious wild intensity of her gaze and mien was deepening, incessantly deepening, until at last I recognized fully that she was in the petrifying throes of some terrible inscrutable fear. Ah, fear indeed; benumbed and shaken in the teeth of some ghastly, incommunicable fear—which whitened her lips and made her eyes one great, fixed, glittering stare.

That day, the doctor was summoned again to the house.

Without a word to me the three remained

together in the upper chamber—an endless while.

The doctor descended alone.

And I recall how the heavy clack of his heels upon the uncarpeted stairs irritated my morbid nerves, so long habituated to no step more onerous than the slippered step of Nellie.

He asked to speak with me, but scarcely had he terminated the request before he followed it with the unspeakable, the diabolical revelation!

Almighty God of the Accursed—has Thou centuries wide enough to bury one mortal memory!

Our child was deaf, dumb and blind!

Without another word he was gone; and I found myself alone.

Alone in the clamoring silence of those unchanged walls, alone with the haunted silence of my cowering soul, alone with a bloodless heart, a breathless body, stunned senses—all dead or dying save for the quick brute-like con-

sciousness that I, and naught, could ever die. Horror of horrors!—to live forever in a death that could never die, alone, forever alone, in the silence of a death which no prayer or curse can ever touch or lift. Was this to be *my* curse?

In those hideous moments treading fast upon one another after the juggernaut of the revelation, my shattered will clung only to one intention—to contemplate my own curse—to face my own hell rather than, for one unwary second, to realize that of the others, of the two beings in the chamber above. Far better all solitudes of hell than one peopled with accusing eyes and fingers!

With the tenacity of despair I clung to my intent and thought only of *my* anguish, of *my* nerves as they strove to steady themselves after the shock. What hot torrents can fall into the heart while seemingly withered in cold? And why does it tick like a clock? Is it the timepiece of some eternity which

marks off its minute pangs as the only realities?

Unsparingly, I held my attention fast upon the poignant centre of self, until suddenly the door opened and a frenzied creature rushed in.

Was this Nellie? Was this the silent wife, the tranquil mother who once had looked up at me from the bed of nativity, so gently, as if she might forgive?

She was unrecognizable in this crazed witch-like woman who burst into the room and fell shrieking upon me, striking me wildly with her small fists, raining mad random blows over my head and chest.

I submitted to them, bowing my head to her attack, and hearkened to her half-strangled words as to a malediction.

"You—you have made her thus. You have cursed my child. Your treatment of me has destroyed her. You have given her this death in life. I hate you, despise you, could kill you for your crime, you—*worse* than murderer!"

Exhausted by her paroxysm of fury, she fell upon the floor and wailed.

Crumpled and motionless, her arms limply outstretched cruciform fashion, she lay and wailed. Wailed and wailed as though she would never end; as though she were filling the cosmos with all its lugubrious notes for the wailing of seas and winds. Ah, blessed is silence, even though the silence of a hell, after the ears have quaked beneath the wails of woman or probed the meaning in the wails of the seas and the winds!

That wailing made the ache in my heart unbearable; it, too, seemed to wail and lament with her; and I slunk from the house and roamed the countryside, blindly seeking the remotest vicinities.

The night grew on as I wandered, and from the confusion of its dusk there sprang forth myriad lights which revealed to my dazed senses the fact that my purposeless steps had brought me to the city.

From the gloom of the nightfall its lights leapt forth and winked like bubbles, beads, spangles, toy-balloons, everything light, festive, heart-free and gay—and smote my soul with a more wretched sense of its own inexorable darkness. Could nothing relieve its cimmerian shade? As I saw the flamed globes broidering the night scene, I began to hanker, desperately hanker for something to lighten my own inner ache of weltering darkness. Wildly I wondered if I too might not find some illuminant to falsify its night. What artifice was procurable to festoon the human gloom? What nepenthe could be wrested from the world to mitigate the heart's most hideous hurt? Would not even a devil grant something to assuage such transcendent anguish as mine?

Like a lurid rift in the smothering pall of my misery—I thought of drink. And in that flashing second before a drop of liquor had ever touched my lips, I became a drunkard.

I was soon an habitu  of the haunts of the god, Alcohol. It did not deceive my hope, but held out to me its all-consuming arms, in whose embrace I found I could—forget. To forget became my sole aim. I feared nothing now but thought and memory; and as soon as I found how the new god granted draughts of oblivion to its votaries, I accepted its tyranny voraciously; believing no yoke could be so unbearable as that which shackled me in the *self-conscience* hell.

With these transfiguring draughts I found I could dishevel my self-consciousness from its aching knot of lucidity, and could glut my heart into stupors that kept it swimming within the smug orbit of illusions. The illusion that came to be the one most plied by me was that I had done nothing in my life which might not have been committed by any strong character under the flagellations of Fate. With the new springs of fire teeming through my veins, I gained the assurance that I was indeed a man

of strength whom superabundance of life's forces imbued with the right of might.

Of course there came implacable hours when I was forced to face my old accursed self, and in a wrecked frame of nerves, inflammation and unutterable debility. These hours were so exquisite in their torture that I could never have borne them, suicide would have been the inevitable resort, had I not found I could relieve their extremity by heaping abuse, insults, even blows upon my wife.

I was forced to this by my own pain. Often it gave me a positive delectation of relief to see her cower and pale at my approach. But what never failed to astound me was that she never resisted nor complained at anything after that one everlasting day when she had lain upon the floor and wailed out her soul.

Had she then broken the inner springs that respond to suffering? How otherwise explain her imperviousness to my brutality? Or might it not be that it afforded a counterpoise to some

profoundly hidden agony within her own breast? At times when my ill treatment of her surpassed itself, I surprised strange eager gleams in her eyes, as though she, too, in this way welcomed the outrages to self which disheveled it from the curse of too lucid thought and memory.

The child was no longer in the house. As soon as I had girded myself within the cuirass of gin, I had commanded that it be removed forever from our home and placed in one of those asylums dedicated to the care of creatures thus afflicted. My wife had complied without protest. Someone had told her that in such an institution her little one's fingers could be taught to serve for its eyes, ears and tongue; and this may have comforted her, and accounted for the patience which ever afterwards characterized her life.

The subsequent years are confused and indeterminate to me. I seemed to be in some vague sphere detached from all surroundings

and contacts, alone with a self that lived like a moribund, solely in its own exaggerated pulse: either speeding softly through my body like a heart-cleaving patter of ghosts or galloping in the glorious deadening paces of sin.

I vaguely remember moving away from the place whose walls had shadowed so dire a drama—and that afterwards we fell so low in the worldly scale that the very memory of the time when I had held a position of trust or of work of any kind, became a grotesque mockery.

I made no attempt to avert the devastation of poverty as it fell fully upon us, but she—yes, shamed as I should be to confess it—she worked; and from the meagre earnings of those humble, marred hands, which now were continually plunged into sud-filled tubs or were pressing out with heavy irons the curled linen of the urbans, from those fateful hands I extracted what portion I required for my unspeakable indulgences.

This lasted for many years. Our life became a routine of poverty and degradation which it seemed no fresh adversity could have power to disturb, when, late one afternoon, I entered our one room, filled with victualled air and the acrid stench of soap, to behold my wife sitting upon the floor, and beside her—our child!

Seven years had now passed since I had last seen her. I had nourished the hope that I was rid of her sight forever. I had forbidden her mother—with unnameable threats—ever to bring her again within the shadow of our shelter; and now her defiance of me transfixed me in speechless amazement.

My wife was sitting upon the floor, one arm around the child's shoulders, and she was talking to this creature who could neither see, nor hear, nor speak, and upon her moving lips there rested its little fingers, lightly, deftly, strangely.

Upon the child's face, protruded in an in-

tentness as though she were listening, hovered the wan, subtle, disturbing smile one sees upon the faces of the blind, upon the faces of all the living dead.

And the mother, too, smiled: smiled as she had done in the days of our courtship, and in the early days after the child was born, before she had learned—the ultimate of calamity. And I noticed how old she had grown since then. Never have I seen anyone age so swiftly as she. Her skull showed through her colorless hair, and breaking over some odd lasting youthfulness of her face were a multitude of puny wrinkles.

In that moment, as I stood there, I remember wondering if the child's fingers were going to touch those wrinkles as they were touching the mouth. And would they find them little graves to be filled with its touch? What was that weird touch seeking? Why did those strange hands do this inexplicable, unheard-of thing?

How did they dare—how did these two confederates against my peace—*dare* afflict me with such a harrowing sight?

At this I started from my stupor of surprise. That vision before me aimed arrows of agony straight at my heart that cut it in a thousand intricacies of smarting pain; the old burning pain which I fancied was buried deep beneath the poison flora of drink. I started from my stupor of surprise and demanded, hoarsely:

“What does this mean?”

My wife looked at me. And I saw that there was no vestige of fear in her, only a consummate calm that faced me in redoubtability as she replied.

“Richard, I have brought her home to stay. She is blessed with the strangest gift. She can understand one’s words by feeling the mouth as it utters them.”

And in her loss of all fear of me—she even seemed oblivious to my presence—she smiled and talked again to the child, whose hands—so

like those of Nellie before our marriage—hovered, fleetingly, searchingly, wooingly, upon her lips.

The affront to my authority was inexpiable. I paled and trembled in the blood-curdling intensity of my indignation. My tongue thickened and clove in dry inarticulation to the palate before I could free its rage of speech. Then I swore, I raved, I paced the floor in violent steps, back and forth, near the doorway; for somehow, even though I was lost to all reason, I could not approach nearer to those two as they sat together, in protective enfoldment, beneath the window whence the livid skies shone in, stamped with the dim pearl crescent of the evening.

As I stormed and raved my wife held the child tightly to her bosom; but she, who could neither see, nor hear, nor speak, seemed suddenly to become aware of my presence, for if ever a face expressed inquiry, hers did, as suddenly she raised it and approached it close to

her mother's in a heartrending interrogativeness.

"Yes, darling," the mother said, as if she understood her, "there is someone here. It is your father."

At this some curious guttural sound burst from the throat of the little thing and she sprang from her mother's arms and came running toward me, her smile brightening as though it sought to greet and welcome.

Yes, that child fled to me gladly as I cursed her; and when she reached me, I stood instantly motionless and mute in some freezing horror of surprise.

For she reached me as directly and swiftly as if she could *see* exactly where I stood, and then tiptoeing up to me, she placed her fingers upon my lips and waited.

Waited!

Oh, God for *what?*

With those chill fingers upon my lips every demon in my being was unloosened to fight for

life. My flesh armed itself in a cold ferocity, my spirit empoisoned itself with the malevolence of mortal dread. To make them drop their touch from off my lips, my mouth filled with imprecations and the lust to bite them; but they *waited*, with an expectant suspensive touch, which rendered me helpless to speak, or bite, or move.

“Richard, say something to her,” said my wife, and her eyes were streaming. “I beg of you to say something kind to her. She will understand it. Treat me as you like but do not hurt her. Take it all out on me later—if you must!”

But I could say nothing with those fingers upon my lips. They choked me, they racked me in every fibre with the old damnation of silence. They threatened to extinguish my very life with their stifling touch—and drawing backwards from them, stealthily, by infinite degrees, lest they arrest my intent, I turned and fled madly from the house.

Until that day my life had been wretched and wicked, but from now on it became appalling. I plunged deeper and deeper into the paradisiac-perdition of drink, for now I had new fears to drown, fears far more terrible than those of thought and memory. Fears of the future, fears of the supernatural, fears which the touch of those fingers had driven into my life, and from now on made it—mere *life*—unutterably tortured and despairing though it was, by far preferable to the things that waited, to the influences of the Super-earthly, to those awful unknowable Elements which meet and claim us *inescapably* in death!

Earth holds no persecution which cannot be escaped in the respites found in drink. But what of the persecutions *after* death! Ah, from them there could be found no respite. Therefore I must live.

So I lived; and lived in fear.

Constant fear of those child fingers which had pressed upon me, that one ineffaceable mo-

ment, and repeated their atrocious ordeal every time I was compelled to return to the place wherein it dwelt.

Yes, inconceivable as it seems, upon my every entrance there the creature fled to me and pressed its fingers upon my lips, to paralyze me with terror, to craze me with the unfathomable mystery of its haunting, expectant, awaiting touch. Never could I speak or move with it upon me; and it greeted me without fail every time I returned to that place. For the creature who could neither see nor hear nor speak, yet *knew*, unerringly, of my presence the instant I entered the door.

And why did I return there? Why did I subject myself to this torture, more frightful than was ever devised by arch-fiend of hell?

Because I was now thoroughly incapacitated for procuring through any means or labor of my own, the wherewithal by which I could secure the oblivion of drink. Without drink I could not live. And I must live.

Hence I was forced to return there, forced to resort to her for what I required. And dearly did I pay for it, well was virtue venged, when my funds were exhausted and I was compelled to go to that spot where *it* waited and ran to meet me upon my every entrance.

One night I was in one of my familiar haunts, sitting alone in a corner of the lurid, noisy room, when I observed a stranger enter who was sufficiently under the influence of drink to become at once jocose and intimate in his address as he leaned over the bar and conversed with one of the attendants. After he had emptied his glass he became still more profuse in his manner and while confiding something to the man, with an affectation of surreptitiousness, he pulled from his coat pocket a thick roll of bills and displayed it to him, chuckling.

The sight of this instantaneously aroused and electrified me; for it suggested an idea

which clutched my mind in the fierceness of its first hope.

"If I could get that from him, it would purchase me freedom, a lengthy freedom for months, perhaps for years, from the necessity of returning to that abhorrent place wherein awaits *its* persecution."

Ah, impossible to describe how this hope appealed to my despair ravaged mind! No sooner had it presented itself than I resolved upon it. By fair means or foul I determined to secure possession of that magic roll.

With no method of procedure resolved upon save this grimly unshakable intent, I approached the stranger and made his acquaintance, with a resumption of all my old suave, ingratiating manners of the past.

Soon we were in that precipitate intimacy achieved by drink. But I—with an acumen and will force of which I would not have previously believed myself capable—refrained from taking any more that night, but plied him clev-

erly. He said that he had recognized me as a friend the moment he had seen me and knew that I was one to be trusted implicitly. Therefore I perceived with satisfaction how easy it was going to be to attain my object.

I permitted him to confide to me various intimacies of his life whilst the hours wore on beyond midnight, and he at last reached the precise stage of semi-helplessness I desired.

Then we went out together, arm-in-arm, into the moist dappled blackness of the night.

I waited until we were far from the last house, straggling on the environs of the town, and were upon the margin of the river, thickly ambushed in trees, before I insinuated my hand deftly into his pocket—as he laughed at one of his own jokes, he was a merry trusting soul!—and extracted the roll there.

My dexterity blundered or he was not so drunk as I had believed; for no sooner had I the roll in my hand than he became aware of

what I had done, and dropping his clasp on my arm, open-mouthed in his alarm, he balanced himself, as he eyed me and then began to plead. He pleaded between hiccoughs for his money as though he were pleading for his life. I started to run from him, but had taken but a few steps when he began to yell. Simultaneously I realized the doom upon me if his clamor were heard and so I was forced to return to him, to hold him and struggle until I succeeded in plunging my pocket knife deep into his throat, and then drew it, nauseatingly, from ear to ear.

When it was all over I found that the front of my shirt, over which the coat had been open, was badly saturated and that during the scuffle—he had prolonged it with a convulsive force unbelievable in one so soft and fat and drunk—I had lost my hat and dared not return to seek where it lay. I could not return even though it seemed I ought to drag that body to the waterside and throw it in; for I feared to

saturate myself still more incriminatingly in that copious blood.

Already the lambent flood of the dawn was falling from the red-rimmed horizon and sickling over the landscape with its disenshroudings. Wisps of vapor hung here and there over the ground like crusts from the whitening skies. From afar the long-drawn note of a train whistle punctured the vast monotony of the air.

I buttoned my coat high over my wet bosom, and for a brief spell I felt *quiet*, in that sense of accomplishment, that instinctive sense of having consummated a *law*, which every supreme deed, whether good or evil, creates in the human heart.

Then the thought of the penalty of murder darted into my mind.

Death! *Again* death threatened me.

Always I had placed an inordinate value upon life—and now after I had taken that of another, it appeared still more inestimably of

value. Does the love of life fatten upon that of which it robs others? I believe so. No human being loves life so intensely as the one who destroy it in others; thus a murderer represents the *triumph* of that passion which is fostered by maternity.

As I realized that I was a murderer, I realized how precious to me my life had become, and with what a delirious lust I was determined to protect myself against any mete of justice. I recollected that murderers had invariably been detected by trifling things which could have been avoided so easily had they used acumen and foresight and not been so fatally transported by excitement, haste or panic. This I must avoid. Every move must be reasoned out: every possibility foreseen.

There was nothing upon the scene of the murder which could possibly connect me with it except the hat. When it fell from my head I was not conscious of it, and it might have rolled into the river, we were so near. But

even if found it could not present any real danger, as no mark of identification was on it and it was the facsimile of the hats of many men who moved in the circles I frequented. Therefore, I concluded, it could furnish no clue of any kind and I could safely leave it wherever it lay.

The only circumstance which could possibly attract attention to me was the fact that I was hatless and might be seen thus in the early morning by someone who would later supply the suspicious incident to the scavengers of crime. I must not be seen until I had procured another hat and as there was no shop within too great a distance to reach safely, there was no alternative but to return to my home where I remembered there was some sort of an old discarded headgear. To avert all risk of observation, I decided to take a circuitous route, avoiding the highways and pursuing the most desolated pathways over fields and hills until I arrived at my destination.

With this single idea of being unseen, and concentrated wholly upon every safeguarding precaution, I set forth on my way in a stealthy, darting pilgrimage through the dew-drenched lands and silver-tipped trees, once or twice breathlessly startled by the looming head of a cow or horse through foliage or over a fence—and never once remembered *what* was awaiting me there at the end of my journey.

Had the thought of *it* occurred clearly to my mind, I believe that, even then, I would have retraced my steps and undertaken to seek my hat *there*, near the dreadful corpse, rather than have gone to that other haunted spot wherein awaited the thing that had crazed me.

But possessed wholly by the alarmed passion of self-preservation—it actually did not occur to my mind until I was at the doorway; too late, alas, to retreat when life was the forfeit.

When I entered I saw that the creature was playing upon the floor with some bits of kind-

ling wood and—for the first time since it abode with us—it seemed unaware of my entrance.

My wife was making the fire in the stove and took no notice of me; so long accustomed was she to the wildness and irregularity of my habits.

Very softly and noiselessly, I began to search for my hat. I could not recall exactly where I had left it, since it had not been worn for a long while—and I rummaged among the encumbered closets and cupboards during what seemed an interminable length of time, before I found it.

Pulling it down hastily upon my head, I drew a deep breath of relief and felt excited almost ungovernably, for the first time since the deed.

I plunged for the door, when simultaneously I was stopped by a trampling sound outside, and then a knocking.

My wife opened the door and there stepped in two men and an officer.

Immediately I knew *why* they were here and saw that their attitude was one of uncertainty. Cunningly I divined it behind their pretentious pose of authority.

They presented no warrant. There was no threat or suspicion in their manner. They merely stated, quietly and simply, that I had been seen leaving a saloon with a man who had been found murdered an hour ago and that I was to be called upon to give an account of my movements since the time I was seen with the murdered man.

Wild beasts when caged can be mastered by those who enter their cage with perfect certitude. They cower and abdicate to those in whom they sense an imperative certainty. But let them falter ever so little from it, let them weaken the merest trifle in their mental grip, and the beasts sense it—through what mysterious power God only knows—and instantaneously will spring and rend. Like a caged beast, I perceived their uncertainty,

and at once realized that I was master of the situation.

Indeed I felt a veritable braggadocio of courage as I thought of my weapon—the old ingratiating ways of my college days which were wont to conquer the ire and suspicion of its authorities—and summoning them now to my aid, with my gentlest, most high-bred air, I prepared to launch forth upon an ingenious explanation that came to me in one of those flashes of genius which dart through the night of danger and which I felt convinced—with a fixed insensate conviction—could not fail to establish an irrefutable alibi, when——

Suddenly, without warning, without hint of its intent, the little creature upon the floor—the thing that could neither see, nor hear, nor speak—sprang up with light feet and ran to me and placed her fluttering fingers upon my lips.

My words froze down into the marrow of my bones and made all silent. My blood for-

sook its channels. My brain dizzied from the abrupt cessation of its train of thought, and mute, stricken, aghast, held in the talons of unearthly Fear, I was solely conscious of those monstrous fingers pressing, pressing down and down, deeper and deeper, until at last they reached and unlocked the foe in my breast.

I was lost. I shouted:

"Yes, it was I who killed him. I will lie no more. Take me. Slay me. I am many times a murderer!"

As the words burst from my lips, *Its* hands fell away from them as if at last satisfied, in fulfilment. They had gained their end.

And I—delivering myself to the foe, to death, found that instead—*I was free!*

Free from fear of them; free from all Fear.

And as the minions of the law fell upon and manacled me, I could have laughed aloud in the victory of my fearlessness. For those fingers had wrenched open my soul but to brand upon it this message:

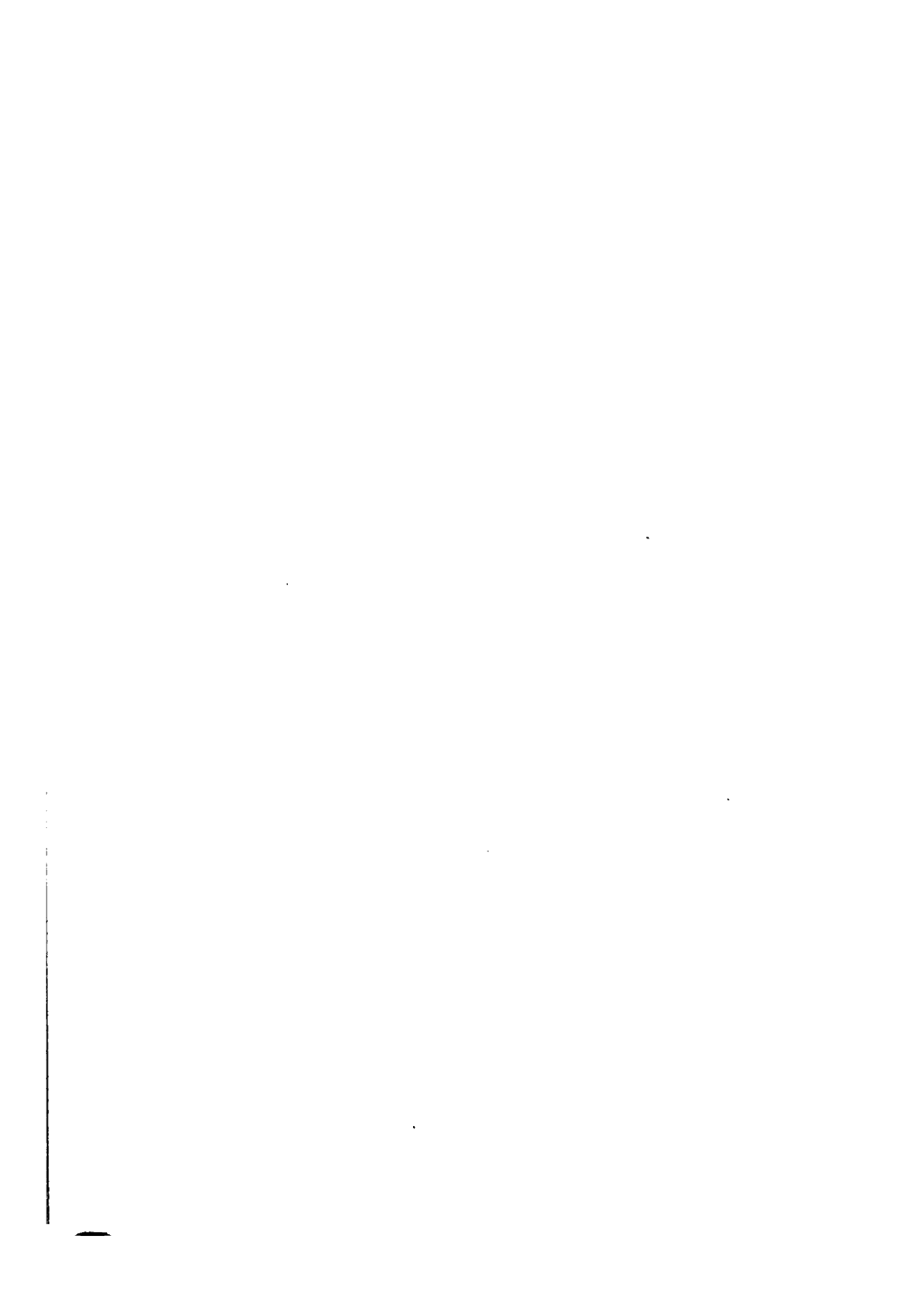
*"He who admits suffering and punishment
into his heart has nothing to fear."*

Thus have I procured my gaiety.

Good-bye, sad world; I pity you. For I,
alone of men, know how you could exchange
the wild pain of your gloom for the fantastic
lightness of my gaiety!

WOMAN IN PROFILE





WOMAN IN PROFILE

"A PAGEANT of profiles!" said Prince Dolmar, as he stood beside his friend, within the embrasure of a window in a club overlooking Fifth Avenue, and watched the motors and carriages passing by in the vivid autumn air.

"The profile of the American woman already interests me," he went on, in his whimsical, ebullient mood, "and, so far, that is all I have had the chance to see of her. I have been in New York but a few days and yet have seen more profiles of women here than I have ever observed in London, Paris or Berlin. Has the American woman mastered the art of the profile? In her fugitive activities and vivacities she seems to promise so. She is always coming or just going and is never really here, or anywhere. Can even marriage make of her a per-

manent factor? I doubt it. Therein consists her charm. Really I am beginning to fancy that I may find my ideal here. My ideal would be found in the woman who has mastered the art of the profile."

"Is it an Art?" queried Sydney Waite, the one friend and cicerone of the Prince in the city.

"An Art indeed. And if you will listen to me patiently I will explain why and how. The woman gifted with the art of the profile would not only be my ideal, but would be the supreme feminine personality of to-day. She would make her position—of superior class and fortune—a thing of romance, instead of the mere feeding trough it now signifies. The great woman of modern times must be she who presents only the profile view of herself and life. She would be a stamp of grace upon democracy; and would make thrones issue from the thoughts of moribund minds. She would be but a profile; a half-revelation; far more stimu-

lating to the taste of to-day than could be a Venus, arising in entire revelation from her ocean concealment. Venus would be a bore. Art has improved her by omitting her arms; thus we still flock to see her statue; but a living complete Venus could not long hold the modern attention. Men now desire their loves overdressed. To their wives they give wings, saying: 'Now hide yourself beneath these and let me alone'; to their mistresses they give the concealment of silks, satins and silence. And if possession of the latter were as legitimate as in ancient times, men would lose all desire for them. A harem is the dullest and most moral place in the world. Where religion has made polygamy a duty, it has taken away all its charm, and made faithfulness to one a lawless sensuality attractive to everyone imbued with imagination. Nowadays if a thing is to remain desirable and precious to man, it must be separated and secreted, like gems wrapped in jeweler's cotton, instead of, as in antiquity, heaped

together and carried openly in salvers and urns. That is why I say the woman of the profile must become the great romantic figure of to-day. She will suit the spirit of her times, the XX Century, as Aspasia suited the Golden Age, Agnes Sorel the XV Century, Du Barry the XVIII Century, and Flora, Republican Rome. For she alone can bring a thrill of poetry into its leveling prose. She will redirect man's imagination from mechanics and the conquest of the air, to Ovid's art and a renaissance of gallantry. Only the woman in profile can achieve this. And why? Because the full face is bourgeois and hopelessly matter-of-fact, whereas the side face piques the inert fancy as it seems to say: 'I am in the attitude of passing visions—hold me if you can. I am placed like the faces of deities when stamped upon metal for the greedy handling of men. I am in the pose of a queen when mingling with her people, giving but half to one side, half to the other, and thus saluted, venerated, idolized, by those subjects who

could never endure the full revelation of aught they worshiped' . . . Ah, the woman who is endowed with a beautiful profile has no shadow upon the other side but that of a crown. More than any other influence, I believe that of a woman's profile has created the havoc of love in man. Invariably it stirs him to seek—the other side; and the entire impetus of love in a man consists in the seeking. Where there is nothing to seek, when all is given, there is nothing to love. The tragedy of marriage is that a man always sees in full face the woman he has wooed in profile. A bench for two lovers, a ride, a walk together, gets its charm because of the profile. Whereas the breakfast table, the conjugal bed and *tête-à-têtes* get their boredom because of the full face. No woman can look reproach at a man with her profile. Nor can it give him candor, simplicity, honesty—three things he really detests in woman. But it does give him illusions, dreams, inspirations: the aliment of love. I believe that more men

have married because of their ideal of a woman's profile at their hearth-side than from any other motive. Disappointment comes when they discover that in marriage the profile turns away and becomes a full face that—talks! ”

“I agree with you there,” ejaculated Sydney, who was married.

“For silence belongs only to the profile, and no man has ever yet had enough of silence in his marriage, or enough of speech in his courtship. The art of the profile is really the great art for woman to-day. The woman is an artist who succeeds in leaving in a man the memory of a profile. Man never wants to retain anything of a woman but a picture, anyway, a picture upon which he can indulge his sentimentality. He does not want to be loved. Witness the unreciprocated loves of the great women whom genius endowed with a rare capacity for love; from Sappho to Mary Wollstonecraft they are recorded, proving that man does not desire to be loved, only to love. His chief need

in life is to adore. One cannot adore the full face; and women maintain the full-face view when they love. Only profiles can be wooed. The full face belongs to the gynæceum. Between the two there is the difference between a fresco and a map. The first is suggestive art, the second, experienced routes. A man looks for flaws in the full-face, but never does aught but admire the profile. They appeal to obverse sides of his nature. If it had not been for some few beautiful women who have had the cleverness to remain as profiles to men, men would never have accorded to women the homage of their respect. We respect only the half-revealed. And love must have respect as one of its components, otherwise it degenerates into the vulgar or the flabby. The great empress Catherine understood this, and was clever enough to kill her lovers after they had lost the profile view of her in the full one; for she realized that love, in them, could never again be so ardent. Sooner or later in every man's heart

there is enshrined the profile of some woman who is never dethroned until he has seen all sides of her, and so thereafter she is presented by memory in full view. I doubt whether Adam would have accepted the fatal fruit from Eve if he had not been surveying her in profile as she plucked it."

"Why, I wonder, does every one try to prove his theories by something in Genesis!"

"Observation of the modern woman is sufficient to establish mine. She bids fair to forget the power of the profile, and to reveal and give too much of herself. I fancy American women are, at present, respected by their men more than are the women of other nations, simply because the American men, as yet, have had no time to study anything of woman but her profile. In Europe, too, she is only a profile; and that is why all discuss her more than they do their own womankind. Is there more than the profile to her? Or is she really a metallic goddess blank upon the other side? This sur-

mise is what interests us foreigners in the American woman. Little is known of her. She does not figure in your history, save as a nebulous background. There is something about her so callous and yet so artificial, so piquantly naïve and yet *poseuse*. Really your American woman is but a profile, as yet. Thence she is interesting and adorable, so long as she makes us dream of—the other side. But what if there is no other side to her? What if she is hiding indigence instead of affluence? What if she can never love, and so can never present to man the full view? Will her profile then lose any of its charm? . . . I have come to discover these things for myself. I shall marry one of your Americans, the one who is most master of the profile, for I could love her; but I shall cure my love by discovering the truth of her full view.”

“So, love, too, you must have?” asked his auditor, now surveying the Prince with his shrewd, appraising, American eye which ever

sought the defect before its valuations, in order to be absolved from the emotional burden of admiration. Sydney admired the extraordinary gifts of mind and person of the Prince to such an extent that it appeased him to realize that his debt-ridden indigence placed him in a position of marketability which depreciated his value to that of a pound of flesh.

The obvious marketability of Prince Dolmar had aroused prejudice and disparagement among the men of the clubs, into which Sydney Waite had introduced him, and it was whispered among them that Sydney, a New York plutocrat of one generation, ambitious for social extensions abroad, was financing the destitute nobleman upon a quest for the golden girl whose plethoric coffers would resurrect the ancient glories of his house. This was covertly resented by the men and rendered them impervious to the brilliant personality of the Prince and to his blithe espousal of his own cause and aim.

“Wait until you have secured your heiress, and you will see them change,” Sydney would say to him, “for Americans can resist anything but success.”

For reasons of his own, reasons Jesuitical, pertaining to that lust of power, rife in the circles in which he moved, Sydney had undertaken to instigate the success of the Prince in another one of the great marriages of international significance consolidating royalty with dollars. Thus when he regarded him at the end of his expatiation upon woman's profile and queried, “So love, too, you must have?” it was with an anxious foreboding before complications. Strange to say, though the Prince claimed to be flagrantly mercenary, there was an incorrigible romanticism in his nature which, at times, bewildered and annoyed those who, like Sydney, were interested in seeing him accept life as an algebraic formula whose ever-besought x must be—wealth. For it alone could solve

his difficulties and reinstate him in his true position.

"Love, too, why not?" replied the Prince. "The profiles of your women are so promising I am beginning to dream, in spite of myself, that I can find one uniting lovability with suitability."

"Do not expect too much; it is the tragedy of youth to want everything. Besides I have already selected the heiress for you. You are to meet her at dinner to-night. She is the richest young woman in her own right, in the Metropolis, and is so strenuously American that America is not big enough for her ambition; hence she is looking for a Prince Charming who will transport her across the seas from where she can safely snowball the statue of Bartholdi. It is amusing to see how our women, when emancipated by wealth from pretence, reveal themselves as curious little anarchists against liberty. Once established in Europe they are the greatest sticklers for form,

ceremony, and royalty. The name of the one you are to meet to-night is Cythia Marlowe. She is a relative of my wife."

"So it is all arranged!" said the Prince with a sigh. It was his goal; his duty, personal, political, ancestral. One can do nothing without money. The politeness of kings is leisure, not punctuality, and their morality consists in immunity from the sordid motives and needs of others. How could these royal prerogatives be secured save through the agencies of wealth? In the past, thrones were built of gold, but to-day they are built upon gold. Dispossessed, the Prince felt that he had a right to come into his own through the ministrations of another. All that he appropriated would be his due. Then why did he sigh? What did he surrender for the triumph of this marriage? Merely the secret ritual, the hidden pomps, of the imponderable Ideal. And to what did ideals lead save to exile from all sympathy, comprehension, and participation in the world? The

Prince loved the world in the way we love the thing that has made us suffer sufficiently to inspire us with the desire to master it. So now he shrugged his shoulders and said:

“Very well. It is understood. I will marry her if the settlements can be arranged. I leave it all to you.”

Sydney was equal to the charge. That night the Prince and Cynthia met; both prepared to accept a personage far inferior to that which they discovered, hence their courtship was initiated in the auspiciousness of surprise.

Cynthia Marlowe, in personality, was staunch, sallow and strident; and affected the extreme of smartness in attire and manner. She had watchful eyes, an indiscreet mouth, unable to close over its stores, and a shapely nose whose nostrils had each a little nick in them, as though worn there by her constant scenting for victims for snubs. In character she was the typical American woman, as the possession of great wealth evolves her. She was empano-

plied in suspicion regarding everything of her own nationality, and was so much like all her social compatriots that her chief aim in life was to distinguish herself from them. Thus she expended her energies and time in a calculating vigil of life. She was vigilant against any abrogation from her wealth and social position, a thing so precarious in the headless chaos of New York society that its quest wholly consumes feminine natures in futile strife with each other, and she refused to know any one whose limitations of purse or visiting list opened them to the suspicion of wanting something from her. Americans want so much themselves that they cannot tolerate any want in another. But vigilance absorbed only a portion of her energies; the rest was expended in calculations as to ways and means of procuring more self-aggrandizement. She was a patronizer of the arts, like all the ambitious plutocrats of her country, but not a patron: that is, she would give a surplus of admiration or money to

any form of art or artist already in their ultimate of rank, beyond any need of her or others, but had no more perception or regard for the uncirculating mintage of art's gold than has a cowslip for a comet. Philanthropy, also, she adopted; for it was fashionable, and kept her name and picture in the papers; but she made her secretary select all the philanthropies to which she so liberally contributed, and protect her vigorously from learning, reading or hearing anything of them. She had now been out five seasons in New York society and had concluded that no fields to conquer were there: everything was too readily and exclusively accorded to the open sesame of wealth. This was not flattering or inspiring to the personal powers she fancied she possessed, and her virile blood, inherited from pioneer ancestors, tingled in somnolence and boredom until she resolved upon a marriage that would transplant her into vast, alien, foreign spheres, whose reluctance to absorb her would stimulate all her faculties and

energies. This is the secret of the American woman's love of deracination. She must have something to overcome; antagonism arms her. The Father of her Country is suitably emblemized by an axe, and this little implement dancing in her corpuscles is the root of her wanderlust and activities.

In a week the Prince and Cynthia were formally engaged. The journals waxed flamboyant over their *fiançailles*. The wife of Sydney Waite negotiated for the rent of one of the great houses in the Faubourg St. Germain, for the coming season; and everyone sought to wine and dine the *fiancés*. They were seen, admired, and envied, everywhere. Snapshots were taken of them as they stood in the rotunda of the Metropolitan and at the Horse Show; and they were described at all the great functions and festivities. Cynthia lost her former strained or *blasée* expression and became urbane and merry, with a novel little air of proprietorship over her blond Prince. And he,

too, manifested all the signs of one whose hopes are consummated.

Ever affable, smiling, loquacious, magnetic from the springs of inner felicity, he charmed everyone by the promiscuity of his brilliancy, which they called his democracy, until his popularity became unprecedented. The *débutantes* called him "Prince Charming" to his face, and the dowagers sent him flowers, and dreamed of a return in strawberry leaves at his table in Paris next season.

Cynthia had ordered her trousseau and preparations for the nuptials were in full sway when suddenly a peculiar change became noticeable in the Prince. His former demeanor made the change still more striking than otherwise it might have been. At first it was observed that he was absent-minded, listless, unnaturally silent and preoccupied, as though brooding over some deep problem or haunting thought. Often when addressed he did not reply or seem to hear, and on the streets he

frequently passed his friends without a sign of recognition. Then it became unmistakably evident that he was avoiding all his former associates. He was seen no more in public and his absence was remarked in the houses and clubs previously frequented by him. He declined all invitations and those already accepted were broken by brief notes from him. Even these in a few instances he neglected to send, and his absence from several dinners where he was expected, made his strange behavior still more generally commented upon. Within two weeks he became a mystery; a mystery over which curiosity agitated itself in vain, for the only ones who could have elucidated it at the time, Cynthia or Sydney, were inaccessible. Sydney was away on a fortnight's hunting trip in Canada, and Cynthia, after she had appeared a few times in the world, unattended by the Prince, and been questioned about him, had also suddenly secluded herself and refused to be communicated with by anyone. But though non-

committal or evasive to inquiries, she had appeared so smiling and gay that the report was circulated of her having broken the engagement because of some belated revelations concerning the private affairs of the Prince. And this was the news that greeted Sydney upon his arrival.

He hastened at once to Cynthia for an explanation. He, too, immediately attributed the cause to her; for he knew the financial plight of the Prince too well to attribute to him any change of mind regarding the hymeneal masterpiece, so artfully contrived.

He was received by Cynthia in her Louis Seize boudoir of rose *fané* and gold. She looked worn and peevish; her complexion was mottled; and the little nicks in her nostrils were enlarged from the inflation of their restive breathing. They suggested the idea to Sydney of little taut reins arched over the steed of her evident distemper. But in a moment she gave vent to her agitation:

“ You ask what is the matter with the Prince and me, when I was just about to send for you and ask you to find out the same thing for me! We have had no quarrel, no misunderstanding, no difficulties of any kind, and yet all of a sudden he has ceased to come to see me, or to go out with me, or even to answer my notes or give me any explanation whatsoever of his strange, his unpardonable behavior. What am I to think? Does he want to break our engagement? If so, he has taken an outrageous method of doing so. Or has something happened to him which he is fearful of revealing to me and which troubles him to the point of mental irresponsibility for his present conduct? Perhaps some affair, some threat, or debt, greater than those he has confessed to? You see, Sydney, how I am giving him every benefit of the doubt. I have waited patiently during these terrible past weeks for an explanation. But now I can bear it no longer. His treatment of me is too humiliating. You must go

to him at once and take this message: if by to-morrow afternoon he does not come to me and fully and satisfactorily explain, I shall not marry him! No; nor shall I ever see him or communicate with him again!"

The last sentences weakened from a tremolo in her voice, and her glaucous eyes became suffused with tears.

"There are still many eligible princes left," she added, plaintively.

"But only one Prince Dolmar."

"I know that. That is why I have stood so much from him. Ah, there is no one else in the world like him. He makes even his money difficulties seem picturesque instead of sordid as they would seem in an American. Even in rags he would be crowned by romance. He is so handsome, brilliant, charming, and while he has treated me so shamefully it has made me realize that I—I *really* love him!"

Then she swore Sydney to secrecy while she

admitted that she would overlook and forgive anything from the Prince if he would but return to her; and charged Sydney with the achievement of this end, urging him to go immediately to him with her message.

The Prince had a small suite in one of the fashionable bachelor apartments just off the Avenue, and Sydney found him there, sunken in the depths of a commodious chair, smoking and reading Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*.

He greeted Sydney with a curious self-conscious manner, as though merely annoyed at the interruption his entrance caused in some phantom panorama of thought, from which he could not disentangle himself sufficiently even to realize the presence of his friend.

Sydney observed with speechless amazement the change wrought in the entire personality of the Prince.

The open, mercurial, exuberant light of his former self seemed to have been completely extinguished upon the surface, and to have

fallen down, deep into some profound recess of his spirit, where it smouldered in an intensity of dejection, in an avidity of despair, which licked its hurts and its solitude in a sombre solace.

His face had the set morose look of one whose life is deflected inwards; its lineaments appeared wasted and parched as though from the preying upon them of insomnia's incubi, and his eyes were congested from the strain of prolonged brooding. Over his whole person was that atmosphere of an unreachable and cherished solitude of soul which frustrates the step of approaching worldliness and disarms all its knowledge, like some vision of a Jacob battling with an angel in the midst of modern men.

Sydney was bewildered and shocked.

"Why, what is the matter, old fellow?" he involuntarily exclaimed. "Are you ill or in trouble?"

"Ill!" replied the Prince, with an intona-

tion of irony, "yes, that is it; I daresay, I am ill."

"In what way?"

"Mentally, spiritually, and so,—physically."

"I am awfully sorry to hear this. But why did you not let me know before, or Cynthia?" Sydney said perfunctorily; then went on, gravely, "Really, Dolmar, illness does not excuse your actions toward Cynthia. There must be some deeper reason than that. You must explain yourself definitely. She is indignant, outraged, and has sent me here to-day with the message that if you do not fully explain by to-morrow at five—all is off between you!"

The Prince shrugged his shoulders and said, softly, "Kismet!"

"Do you mean to imply that you do not care? Dolmar, what in the name of Heaven is the matter with you?"

"Sydney, I will be frank with you. During the past weeks I have been going through a terrible conflict trying to decide whether or not I

can go through with the mockery of this marriage. All of a sudden it has become distasteful, nay worse, repulsive, tragic, to me! ”

“ What has happened to make it so? Only a few weeks ago and it represented the goal of your ambitions, the acme of all success. What has happened to change you so? ”

“ Something has happened, I admit,” he replied, slowly, as though verging on detachment into reverie.

“ Come, confide everything to me. Have I not already proved myself your friend? ”

“ Indeed, yes, Sydney,” said the Prince in a low, melancholy tone, “ and believe me when I tell you that it has been only on your account that I have hesitated, in this strife of irresolution. I felt that I *must* marry Cynthia in order to pay my debt to you, while for my own part, I would prefer never to see her again.”

Then in a changed voice he added abruptly:

“ Sydney, I am in love.”

“ In *love!* ” Sydney drew a whistling breath

and surveyed him with mocking distrustful eyes. "With whom?"

"Alas, that I myself do not know!"

"You are jesting!"

"Do I look like one who jests?"

"Then you must be mad. How can you be in love when you say you do not even know with whom?"

"It is true. I do not know her name or anything about her, but I have *seen* her; and that is enough. I have seen her every few days during the past three weeks and that has been sufficient for me to recognize in her—beyond the cavil of a doubt—my ideal."

"The woman in profile?" queried Sydney, endeavoring to subdue his sarcasm until he had elicited the full particulars.

"Ah, you remember that! I am glad. Now you will understand. That realization of her, long before I ever saw her, should alone prove that it is Fate. He who thwarts fate disorganizes his life and self. I have seen this woman

only in profile. But I know her as well as I know myself, for I have dreamed of her all my life."

"Where have you seen her?"

"There," he designated one end of the octagonal chamber, "from that window. It directly faces some windows in a rear wing of the Hotel—and in one of them I found her."

Sydney could scarcely restrain his derision, but dared not betray it, as he saw that the Prince was in deadly earnest and grew more and more excited as he bestowed his confidence.

"In the one opposite my own. I never know when she will be there. Once or twice she has appeared on consecutive days and again several have elapsed before she is visible. She remains there for varying lengths of time, but never very long. And Sydney, there is a strangeness about the way she comes and goes from that window which mystifies me. It is most puzzling, mysterious, disquieting. And she herself is so strange, so thrillingly, inexpli-

cably strange, that I cannot satisfy myself that I am not the victim of an hallucination. This doubt of myself, coupled with my infatuation, is either crazing or killing me! Oh, Sydney, it is really a godsend that you have come to me to-day. For perhaps you can prove whether or not I am beset by some unheard-of form of insanity, some perversion of vision, or maniacal delusion, or what!"

Impetuously, he arose.

"She may be there now. Come, let us see."

The two men went to the window and through the frail tracery of the sash curtain, looked beyond into the casement opposite, so near that it seemed within a deceptive arm's reach. Sydney started to draw aside the intervening net when the Prince arrested his hand.

"No, we must not be seen. Someone else is in that room who watches her constantly: a veritable Cerberus!—whether servant, guardian, father, or just what, I cannot for the life of me determine. But once, at the start, when

I was unwary, he caught sight of me and immediately drew her away. For five days afterwards, she did not reappear. Since then I have been most cautious."

But as he was speaking Sydney was wholly absorbed in contemplation of what was visible opposite, beyond the high casement: a woman's face in profile, an exquisite face, impassive as though sculptured, and yet aglow with all the tints of life; and crowning it was a wealth of tawny hair whose tresses cradled each other in a slumbrous vivacity like that of covied serpents. She was looking down. Her lashes lay like a black butterfly at rest upon her cheeks. One could imagine her reading a Book of Hours, pictured by Clovio. She looked like a creature emerged from a missal, sealed away from the world by the golden clasp of a reliquary, but reigning over some effulgent refuge of life which could be reached by love's ladder of dreams.

"Do you see her?" whispered the Prince,

as though he doubted the evidence of his own senses.

"Certainly," confirmed Sydney, himself doubting the reality of the apparition, so mysterious did it appear in its stillness, so fabulous in its rapt posture and supernalism.

"Then it is neither delusion, nor phantasy, nor am I mad!" The Prince drew a deep breath of relief. "But Sydney, she is always the same. She never turns to the window. She never looks out. She never moves except as she comes and goes. What do you make of it?"

"It is certainly odd," muttered Sydney, his brows drawn in perplexity, while a thrill of the inexplicable quivered through him. "There is certainly a woman there. Of that there can be no doubt."

"Look, here he comes. What is *he*?" cried the Prince, suddenly gripping Sydney's arm, as there appeared beside her a little old man, with a sinister face, brassy tinted and withered as a

russet apple, a white goatee, and enormous black eyebrows, giving it a foreign appearance. He bent over the woman and seemed to be addressing her with words to which she vouchsafed no reply.

"What is he?" repeated the Prince, in an anxiety that summoned his friend to explain and dispel all the peculiarities of the sorcerous scene. "What is he—to her? Can you imagine?"

Sydney did not reply, so concentrated was his attention, and after an interval of silence, the Prince said to him, very low, "Sydney, the idea has just flashed upon me that he has hypnotized her. That at least could account for *her* demeanor. Observe closely all his movements—and let us see if this is not a solution."

The pantomime in the window had become still more wildly mysterious. The old man was now bending over her and touching her hair with what seemed a strange befondlement or necromancy, until it became evident that he was

withdrawing hairpins from the coils of her hair. Slowly, one by one, he proceeded to draw them forth until at last all her hair tumbled down suddenly over her throat and shoulders, like Danae's caressing shower of gold. Then he produced a tortoise shell comb which he began to draw sinuously through the thick rivulet.

"A *coiffeur!*" ejaculated Sydney, buoyantly recovering his poise as he scented a humorous element in the affair.

"No; he *loves* her hair. You can see that in his every gesture. To comb it is but some indulged folly of his dotage. . . . Sydney, if it were not for her hair I would not believe her alive. But look at it. How marvelous and living it is!"

And the two silently regarded the spectacle as though participating in some phenomenal event. The hair responded like a living thing to the traffic of the comb; it sleekened from the strain of its touch, it curled voluptuously upon

its departure, it tossed hither and thither in ethereal abandons beside the ravished track. The tresses of the Vilas in which was confined all the essence of their lives, could never have been more sumptuously vivific than this lady's hair; the becombed locks of the Rhine maid, high perched between St. Goar and Oberwesel, could never have been so perilous to hazardous gaze as were the sentient strands, the enshrouding scintillance of this lady's hair,—to the infatuate eyes of the romantic Prince.

“Good God!” burst from his trembling lips.
“I can stand this no longer!”

And he went and threw himself upon a lounge, burying his face in a cushion. Sydney came and sat beside him, embarrassed because he did not dare to laugh at the bewildering incongruity of a situation which might bear such disastrous consequences to the whole future of the obsessed Prince. He was frantically ransacking his mind for some way to extricate the Prince from the amatory web of his own devis-

ing, when he lifted his haggard, flushed face from the cushion and said:

"Sydney, I know this is utterly absurd. But that makes no difference to me. I cannot throw it off. Love is a disease, and I fancied I was immune from it because I have never loved before. Love is a disease of which only the morbid are victims. The morbid are those who have either a devastating excess or debilitating want of vitality in their constitution. Love, in both, is merely the craving for soundness, but only the unsound can love"——

"Ah, you are coming to your senses."

"Yes; love is a disease; it is disorganization of the individual will, which is replaced by an unconscious volition for self-destruction. Love began when identity was created from chaos, and its longings are 'to be undone,' to revert to primordial forms, to merge the aching self-consciousness into something vaster and stronger than itself. Its ecstasies are merely the electrifying vertigoes from the surrender of

the will; ecstasies experienced as well by the martyrs in arenas or at the stake. A lover is the martyr of nature. Only those are capable of love who are wounded in the will to live; for love is but incipient degeneracy, emotive monomania, hyperæsthetic idealogy, psychic neurotism, paranoic obsession—yes, always a disease, betokening the abnormality of evolved, highly civilized man. Its agonized desires are only for cure, and it turns for cure to the one who can most hurt it, to the one who has depersonalized its will, to the one who has confused and broken its identity, to the one—beloved. We only love the thing that has the power to destroy us. I know this and yet—I love! ”

“ What are you going to do about it? ”

“ It depends upon her. First I must know her; then—I must have her! ”

“ Would you give up Cynthia for this? ”

“ Of course. What is the whole world to me now that I have recognized Fate? ”

"But you have no money!"

"Ah, you Americans, you never let one forget money. Well, I can work. I have never had anything worth working for until I saw her."

"You are certainly mad!" cried Sydney in a sardonic gravity as he perceived the seriousness of an influence upon the Prince sufficiently strong to drive him even to work. For a troubled second he faced the havoc of his own plans and of the Prince's career, then a flash of illumination passed over his face.

"Dolmar, it is only the mystery and distance of this woman which attracts you. You will be disenchanted as soon as you meet her."

An incredulous smile lifted the moody corners of the Prince's lips.

"There is no chance of that. I know myself and her too well. But I must meet her; and it seems impossible even to find out who she is. Already I have inquired at the hotel and they profess a very suspicious ignorance

of the inmates of the room whose locality I have precisely designated. And I have been taking all my meals in the café there, in the hope of encountering her, and have inquired of the waiters, but all in vain. I cannot glean the vestige of a fact concerning her. Sydney, perhaps you can do so for me? Find out who she is and then I can manage to convey a letter to her."

Sydney eagerly accepted the commission and took his departure. The next morning he returned.

"Well?" demanded the Prince, his whole soul tense and throbbing in the vocable. His fever-glazed eyes revealed a sleepless night and his whole attitude was one of petitioning impatience.

"I have found out everything. I will tell you all in a moment." He looked as though he were making some tremendous effort to restrain equivocal emotions. The muscles about his mouth were twitching and his gaze avoided

the searching one of the Prince. Then he launched forth on a detailed recountal of how he had gone to the hotel and engaged a room for the night adjacent to the one which he discovered held the Prince's inamorata, of how he had questioned the servants and bribed—when suddenly the impatience of the Prince became ungovernable and he burst out:

“I don't want to hear how you managed it. Simply tell me *who* she is.”

Sydney started to reply, when suddenly his face was convulsed with laughter; his body shook in an uncontrollable spasm, and he laughed until he was as red as a gobbler's comb, the veins stood out on either side of his forehead, and from his fattened eyes streamed tears.

The Prince drew in his breath with a sibilant sound and towered in speechless indignation. About his violated spirit he drew the memory of his royalty like a garment of purple and ermine, from whose tattered dignity he enun-

ciated in a deliberateness meant to be crushingly impressive:

"Sir, Prince Dolmar cannot be insulted—"

"Oh, wait a moment, Dolmar," Sydney gasped, recovering from his laughter.

"I demand an apology."

"Listen. You will understand all in a moment. Have you ever heard of the Baron of Biarritz? Well, he is a rich and eccentric nobleman who had the singular experience of having married and lost, through death, seven successive wives. After the death of the last one he had a life-size likeness in wax made of each of them; and with these images of the beloved deceased, he has lived for many years in his château, on the Bay of Biscay, happy in the illusion of their life, amusing himself by sending to Paris for the latest fashions and jewels for his seraglio, a devoted polygamist, until all of a sudden it struck him that they were all too artificial save one. This one became his favorite. So much so that he has deserted the others, and

eloped to America with her in order to try an experiment of monogamy, whose secrecy he has well-paid servants to maintain. Dolmar, the old man in the window is the Baron of Biarritz."

"And she?"

"Is the effigy of his favorite wife."

The Prince was silent a long while.

"Ichabod," he finally murmured, "the glory hath departed!"

Then with a crestfallen air he went over to the rack where hung his hat and coat and taking them down, said:

"I am going to Cynthia."

As they walked down the Avenue together, he broke a prolonged silence with the words:

"The Baron of Biarritz must be the only happy man in the world, for no one has disturbed his illusions."

To which his friend merely replied, as they stood at the stoop of Cynthia's house:

"Dolmar, I advise you never to look at any